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ABSTRACT

Exploring the range and diversity of humorous literature for children, this book attempts to remedy the past neglect of children's humorous books by taking humor seriously. The first five chapters of the book discuss what children find funny and at what age, different kinds of humor found in children's literature, passages of humorous tone in otherwise serious books, picture book humor, and humorous verse. The sixth chapter consists of a brief historical overview of humorous literature for children. The seventh chapter provides teachers with a range of practical classroom activities which focus on the many facets of humor in children's literature. The bibliography lists 63 picture books, 44 books for younger readers (pre-school to nine years), 54 books for older readers (10 to 15 years), 55 books of verse, and 8 joke and riddle books. Contains 41 references. (RS)

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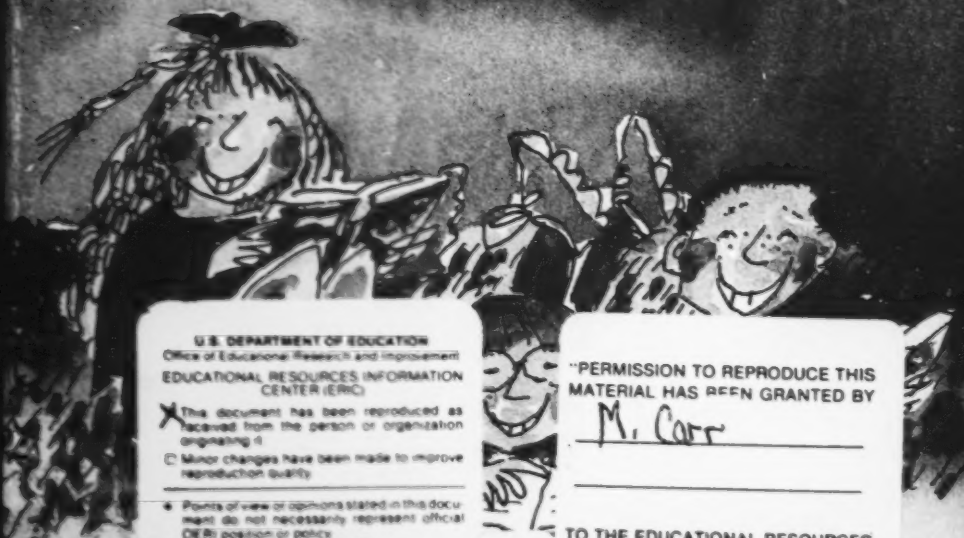

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Primary English Teaching Association

Literature Support Series

Laugh Lines

EXPLORING HUMOUR IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Kerry Mallan

illustrated by David Cox

CS214093

Primary English Teaching Association

Literature Support *is an occasional series of shorter books designed to guide teachers within particular areas of children's literature. Each book suggests ways of approaching one of these areas in the classroom and includes extended lists of relevant titles.*

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Humorous books, which are so much loved by children, have often been passed over by critics as being good fun but not 'good literature'. Indeed, they are rather like Cinderella — always present but seldom recognised for their contribution. Thus one of my purposes in writing this book has been to remedy past neglect. I have also wished to explore the range and diversity of humorous literature for children and to delve into the nature of humour itself. My hope is that, just as Cinderella was able to emerge from the kitchen and become the belle of the ball, *Laugh Lines* will enable humorous literature to become for a while the centre of attention and, paradoxically, be taken seriously.

What is it that makes us laugh? How do writers use humour as a device to delineate character, to develop plot or to trigger a response in the reader? The first five chapters of this book are devoted to exploring these questions and others. They discuss what children find funny and at what age, different kinds of humour found in children's literature, passages of humorous tone in otherwise serious books, picture book humour, and humorous verse. Chapter 6 consists of a brief historical overview of humorous literature for children.

Chapter 7 provides teachers with a range of practical classroom activities which focus on the many facets of humour in children's literature. Its purpose is not to take the fun and enjoyment out of children's reading, but to enhance their appreciation of the craft of writers and illustrators in creating a humorous text. Children, as readers and writers, can be taught to develop more sophisticated skills in these areas of critical literacy and literary appreciation.

Teachers are aware of the appeal that humorous writing has for children. The mere mention of many memorable characters — Winnie the Pooh, Penny Pollard, Willy Wonka and so on — will spark delighted recognition. Thus librarians, parents and teachers are often in search of a funny book to read to or buy for children. The bibliography is intended to supply a range of titles to suit all grades from pre-school to lower secondary. Many of the titles listed are recent publications or reprints of older books, but those which are out of print will no doubt be available in many school and public libraries.

chapter one

What do children find funny and when?

Humour is a rather slippery term. It is not to be confused with laughter, for you can be amused without laughing. The reverse is also true. For example, some children can't help laughing when they're in trouble; it helps release the tensions they feel.

Nelson (1989, p. 4) proposed a common understanding of the term when he wrote: 'I like to think of humor being the quality that makes a person laugh or smile and consequently feel good . . . ' By contrast, the definition offered by Shaeffer and Hopkins (1988, p. 89) suggests a duality in the nature of humour:

> *Humor is a magical thing that allows us to endure life's hardships such as death, sickness, hunger, pain and fear. It is the bond that can bring us together and, if used as a weapon, tear us apart.*

Our readiness to laugh, smile and appreciate humour is often referred to as having a sense of humour — though, as Ogden Nash realised, there is more than one:

> *In this foolish world there is nothing more numerous*
> *Than different people's senses of humorous . . .*

Nevertheless some sense of humour is a valuable attribute for anyone, young or old, for humour is a peculiarly human way of coping with the unrelenting pressures of reality.

Changing patterns of humour

Humour has a chameleon-like nature; it changes from one context to the next, from one moment to another. It changes as society changes and it changes as individuals get older. A child's sense of humour is not the same as an adult's. Admittedly there are some things which seem to have a universal comic appeal, with no age barriers, but there are many more stories, poems and riddles which appeal to different ages.

Young children are interested in the way language works. It is little wonder, then, that successive generations have found the nonsense rhymes of Dr Seuss and the rhythms and playful imagery of nursery rhymes very funny. Older children, on the other hand, find that sophisticated word play in the form of puns or riddles and different kinds of jokes (often gross or obscene) are a means of achieving social interaction and acceptance by their peers.

Yet differences in appreciation and understanding of humour are not linked solely to a common age range, for children of the same age will not all laugh at the same things. Other factors such as intellectual ability, past experiences and the level of sophistication of comic material will influence the individual child's response.

Broadly speaking, however, children of any age tend to find humour in materials that deal with their basic concerns.

Research into what children find funny has come up with the following elements:

exaggeration	human predicaments
surprise	ridicule
slapstick	defiance
the absurd	violence
verbal humour	incongruity

(Kappas 1967; Klause 1987)

However, a list like this does not explain why certain things and not others appear funny to children of different ages. What we need is an understanding of how children respond to humour at different ages — even if the extent to which such responses can be seen as a product of cultural conditioning rather than as a marker of cognitive and emotional development is yet to be resolved.

According to McGhee (1979), the key element in all humour is incongruity. Incongruity arises when something out of keeping with the normal state of affairs occurs. People often laugh when they encounter something odd or unexpected. Anthony Browne's pictures of a three-cup bra hanging on the washing line or a man walking a pig on a leash are examples of humorous incongruity. Of course, to appreciate incongruity, children have to be old enough to know about the way things normally are and be able to recognise an oddity for what it is.

The pre-school child's humour

Very young children do and say things which they consider quite serious but which adults find very funny. Wearing adults' clothing or putting a potty on their heads is just part of young children's play, but adults are amused by the incongruity. Correspondingly, when parents do something incongruous like pretending to suck a baby's bottle, this will be greeted with much amusement by small children. However, as children get older and master the business of getting dressed, a sense of superiority will emerge if you show them Shigeo Watanabe's book about a bear who has trouble putting the right clothes on the right parts of his body (*How Do I Put It On?*).

Authors like Pat Hutchins often use animals or monsters instead of children when they want to objectify the humour caused by an innocent (or incompetent) young character in a story. Frank Asch's *Bear's Bargain* shows the bear's early attempts to fly and make a kite ending in disaster. Eventually he makes a beautiful kite and realises that, whilst he can never fly, a drawing of himself on the kite is the next best thing. This story succeeds because the incidents match a pre-school child's own attempts at trying to master tasks and solve problems.

For pre-schoolers, misnaming of objects and people can be another source of fun. Calling Teddy 'Grandma' or vice versa is often considered a great joke. Dr Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is a good example of inventive naming, and A. A. Milne's coinage of 'woozle' for the creature which Winnie the Pooh tracks round and round the larch trees seldom fails to delight small children.

Pre-schoolers are at an age when they are beginning to realise the benefits of telling jokes and riddles, though they themselves are really at a pre-riddle stage. They quickly learn that an adult will invariably give them attention and a response when told a joke. More often than not their jokes and riddles are their own inventions, because it's too demanding to remember jokes they've heard and riddles are usually beyond their comprehension and lexical ability. None the less, though used as a means of gaining attention, humour is becoming more social.

The primary child's humour

The first years of primary school see a further development of earlier forms of humour. Six- to eight-year-olds still enjoy reversals of role and visual incongruity, and their appreciation of conceptual incongruity becomes wider. Many will enjoy Janet and Allan Ahlberg's *Funnybones*, which tells of three skeletons, 'a big skeleton, a little skeleton and a dog skeleton', who decide to go for a walk one night in order to 'frighten somebody' (pun intended). The idea of skeletons walking around town, one wearing a top hat and holding a dog skeleton on a leash, is conceptually as well as visually amusing.

Paul Jennings plays with the idea of conceptual incongruity in his short story 'Only Gilt' (from *Unbearable!*). The reader is first

introduced to the protagonist, a boy wearing a bird cage on his head, who goes on to tell how this came about. The opening lines confront the reader with the basic incongruity:

> *The bird's perch is swinging to and fro and hitting me on the nose. I can see my eye in its little mirror. Its water dish is sliding around my chin. The smell of old bird droppings is awful. The world looks different when you are staring at it through bars.*
>
> *Fool, fool, fool.*
>
> *What am I doing walking to school with my head in a bird's cage?* (p. 22)

Margaret Mahy's zany book *The Pumpkin Man and the Crafty Creeper* plays with the idea of reversal of functions. Kindly Mr Parkin takes on a creeper which, to his amazement, demands to be entertained, but although he works hard at indulging its every whim, he wins little pleasure or appreciation.

As children grow older, their perceptions of what is funny and their experiences of life and people broaden to allow them to

accommodate and appreciate a greater range of comic situations. By the upper primary years they are also becoming more linguistically sophisticated — able to tell and enjoy 'real' riddles, jokes and conundrums as they realise that there may be multiple meanings to words and actions.

From about eight years of age, children begin to appreciate that riddles have two possible answers: the straight one (to be ignored) and the joking one. Punning riddles invite them to understand either that a word has two meanings or that a word image has two interpretations: e.g. *What goes up and down the stairs without moving?* (A carpet.) Conundrums show their developing sophistication of language and ability to use puns: e.g. *What is the difference between a warder and a jeweller?* (One watches cells and the other sells watches.) Their understanding of parts of speech (even if they can't yet articulate it) leads them to make nouns do the work of verbs: e.g. *Why did the jam roll?* (Because it saw the apple turnover.)

Books which contain puns in their titles or in their stories are appreciated by primary children (though the more subtle puns tend to be missed and are best left for high school). Often children are attracted to books by an arresting title, such as *The Paw Thing* (Jennings), *Outer Face* (Harris) or *Spooner or Later* (Jennings, Greenwood & Denton).

So-called 'sick jokes' begin to be shared in the upper primary years. According to June Factor (1988, p. 155), children will invent sick jokes and riddles which reflect a topical event: 'During the prolonged debate on the Azaria Chamberlain case (1980-1987), dozens of jokes and riddles on the subject circulated schools'.

Similarly there are AIDS jokes and jokes about current politicians, movie characters and pop stars.

Reactions to slapstick and violence have undergone a change by the late primary years. Wild car chases and crashes in movies will often provoke cheers and laughter from older children, whereas for younger ones such violence may prove upsetting. When violence is presented in literature, older children are probably better equipped to handle it because they are better able to distinguish between reality and fantasy. They can also appreciate parody and gross exaggeration. There are limits of course to the nature and extent of the violence that will be tolerated, but situations which allow characters to emerge relatively unscathed are treated light-heartedly. Consequently older children are able to laugh at the cruel behaviour of Miss Trunchbull (in Roald Dahl's *Matilda*) as she swings a child by the pigtails and abuses her and her mother simply because she hates pigtails.

High school humour

Whilst humour needs to be fairly up-front for most primary age children, by high school age more subtle forms are emerging. Teenagers are able to engage in puns and spontaneous forms of wit more readily than younger children, and this more sophisticated humour provides them with intellectual challenges as well as a congenial means of interacting with their peers.

Parodies and allusions are appreciated as long as they fall within the realm of children's experience. For instance, parodies of well-known fairy tales, such as *Snow White in New York* (French), are enjoyed for their clever visual and verbal allusions and word play. However, problems occur when the reader has no frame of cultural reference for the humour. For example, in *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack* (Kerr), the cat is named Nader after Ralph Nader, but Australian teenagers today will probably not be familiar with this American consumer advocate who made his name in the 1960s and 1970s.

By late primary school and early high school, grossness is a popular channel for humour. This originates partly in teenagers' desire to break away from childhood and adult codes of acceptable behaviour. *Fungus the Bogeyman* (Briggs) is still popular with older

readers and still condemned by many adults. Fungus' world is a complete inversion of our sanitised world; Briggs has taken 'bad taste' and promoted it as the norm. Earlier works by Paul Zindel also strive for a certain grossness, as his titles suggest: *Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eye Ball!*, *Confessions of a Teenage Baboon* and *The Undertaker's Gone Bananas*.

Teenagers are still egocentric and enjoy reading stories about people like themselves and their peers. Themes such as acceptance within the peer group, being loved and breaking away from parental domination are common to many realistic novels teenagers seek out and read. A frequent underlying theme is the collision of wishes and reality. Often the tone of these books is light and they present a bittersweet account of the young lives of the characters. In *Losing Joe's Place* (Korman), Jason and his two friends believe that they are set to have the ultimate summer holiday living in Jason's older (and much admired) brother's flat in Toronto. This experience of living away from home and parental supervision is one that most teenagers would dream of. Yet, like most dreams, Jason's soon disappears and is replaced with an unappealing reality. Although Korman is able to show the downside of the boys' summer experience with much humour, readers feel grateful that this was one summer dream they weren't part of.

Knowledge of various stages of development in children's taste for humour provides us with one criterion for selecting books for them. Another is knowledge of the types of humour present in children's literature — an aspect explored in the following chapter.

chapter two

Types of humour in children's literature

According to Beckman (1984), there are three primary elements in humorous fiction for children: character, situation and discourse. These elements supply a framework for the following discussion.

1 Humorous characters

Exaggeration of human traits and foibles is one device used to create humorous characters. Of course, in order to appreciate the humour generated by exaggeration, the reader needs to be familiar with the type of person the character is satirising, whether it be a teacher, cleric, police officer, shopkeeper or someone else.

Poking fun at authority figures

Teachers are the obvious choice for exaggerated portraiture in children's books, for children are experts when it comes to telling tales about this group. Max Dann shows that teachers may not always be what they appear in his very funny book *Clark*. Clark is terrified of his teacher, who seems so large and frightening in class. Although he tries to avoid him, Clark has to pass his house on the way to the shops. One day he discovers the teacher hanging out of a second-storey window of his house in obvious distress. What follows as Clark tries to help is pure slapstick. His clumsy attempts at rescue only worsen the situation. As he tries to grab hold of the

man, bits of him come away — glasses, toupée, false teeth. When order is finally restored, Clark notices that Mr Grimwraither (Grim Reaper?) looks like a normal person. In this manner Dann exposes the expectations and preconceptions children have about their teachers being different from normal human beings.

In *The Heroic Life of Al Capsella* (Clarke), the teenagers have enough knowledge of and experience with teachers to appreciate the eccentric behaviour of staff at Al's school. The school librarian, Dr Spinner, provides a good example:

> *Dr Spinner is mad about books, though in an entirely different way to the Capsellas. They're mad about reading books; Dr Spinner is mad about keeping them in order. She's the kind of librarian who believes that libraries are for books, and people have no business there.* (p. 65)

The 'innocent'

An ingenuous central character is a recurring feature in recent children's literature. Sue Townsend successfully created Adrian Mole as an archetypal naive adolescent in her hilarious book, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4*. Comedy and tragedy are different sides of the same coin, and so in Adrian we find a character who makes us laugh, yet earns our sympathy as well. However, perhaps it requires a certain maturity in the reader to be aware of the duality of such a character.

Nothing goes right for Adrian. For example, he's tempted to sniff glue while making a model aeroplane — only to get his nose stuck to the undercarriage and go to hospital to have it removed (the undercarriage, that is). He has the same concerns as many teenagers: his parents' marital problems, his changing body, girl-friends. The humour arises from the juxtaposition of his own naive accounts of life with the knowledge the reader has of what's really going on.

Another character who views life from an innocent, egocentric stance is Keith in *Misery Guts* (Gleitzman). Keith tries in vain to cheer up his parents and make life less dull and miserable in cold, grey Britain. He paints their fish and chip shop in Tropical Mango Hi-Gloss, makes his father a birthday cake in the shape of a haddock and buys a large dead tropical fish (which is a bit off but cheap).

There are parallels between Keith's life and that of Adrian Mole. Both stories chronicle a series of well-intentioned disasters occasioned by two naive, misunderstood characters. Keith, however, does achieve his immediate goal of getting his parents to leave Britain for Australia.

The sequel, *Worry Warts*, tells of life at Orchid Beach near Cairns. It works as part of a story cycle because Keith soon discovers that his parents are just as miserable as they were in Britain, despite the sunny new locale.

Boys are not the only subjects for portrayal as the 'innocent'. Female characters such as Penny Pollard (Robin Klein), Megan Moon (Margaret Wild) and Ramona (Beverly Cleary) provide humorous examples of the type.

The appeal of these characters lies in their honest and frank observation of life. However, it is a challenge for writers to entice their readers to laugh at characters with whom they can probably identify. Thus it's often better if readers are a little older than the character, as this enables them to laugh more comfortably at the

character's ignorance. Certainly some kind of distance must be maintained, for if identification is too close, there is a danger that the reader will feel too threatened by the character's weaknesses to laugh at all.

Animals and toys which are childlike, if not completely anthropomorphised, can provide humour for young children. The antics of such characters often put them at odds with the established order. Harry, the little dog created by Gene Zion, is like the youngest member of the family, and his behaviour recalls the mischief of the misunderstood small child. Similar characters which get into harmless mischief because they share a view of the world which resembles a young child's and is at odds with an older, more 'mature' point of view are Mog the Forgetful Cat (Judith Kerr), Wilberforce (Margaret Gordon), Corduroy (Donald Freeman), Paddington (Michael Bond) and Winnie the Pooh (A. A. Milne).

Not all humorous 'innocents' are children, toys or animals. Adults also can be portrayed in this way, with children taking on the more conventional adult stance. This role reversal often achieves very funny results — as in Debra Oswald's *Me and Barry Terrific*. The narrator is Gina, whose father, Barry Terrific, embarrasses her continually with such antics as dressing up as a giant banana and strolling through the local shopping centre. *Blabbermouth* (Gleitzman) also looks at a young girl's embarrassment over her father's idiosyncratic behaviour:

> *I had a vision of Dad at the P and T barbie in his most jaw-dropping shirt, the purple and yellow one, digging people in the ribs and singing at them and sword fighting Mr Cosgrove with a T-bone steak . . .* (p. 45)

2 Humorous situations

Situational humour usually creates incongruity by introducing an element of absurdity into otherwise conventional circumstances. An egg being hatched is not abnormal unless the creature sitting on the nest is an elephant, which is what happens in Dr Seuss' *Horton Hatches the Egg*. This type of situational humour is often pure nonsense.

Nonsense

Nonsense is a brand of humour that appeals to children, and, in *The Bugalugs Bum Thief*, Tim Winton shows what can happen when nonsense becomes quite ludicrous. Someone steals all the backsides of the inhabitants of the town of Bugalugs, and it is left to young Skeeta Anderson to do some detective work to find the thief. The climax comes when Skeeta has successfully tracked down the culprit and located the haul:

> *There it was, a gigantic stockpile of human bums, bottoms, backsides and buttocks reaching almost to the roof. Four hundred and ninety-six units, all still in good condition (though some in better shape than others).* (p. 35)

In *The Cabbage Patch Fib*, Jennings takes a 'what if' approach to the age-old story about babies being found in a cabbage patch. When young Chris finds a strange-looking green baby in a cabbage, he very quickly learns the trials and tribulations of parenthood. The situation is extended to gentle parody when children with their cabbage patch dolls line up with Chris and his real cabbage patch baby at lunch time to play 'mothers and fathers'.

Roald Dahl's *The Twits* blends nonsense and grossness as Mr and Mrs Twit try to outdo each other with nasty tricks. For example, Mrs Twit puts her glass eye in the beer jug of the unsuspecting Mr Twit to give him a scare and prove that she's always got her eye on him.

Transformation

The motif of transformation is common in traditional literature, where a prince is turned into a frog, a crane into a beautiful girl and so on. It is also used by contemporary writers to create comic situations. In *Thinking Power* (Matthews), Jamie finds that after an accident on his skateboard he has developed 'thinking power' — the ability to make things happen simply by thinking about them. He is able to make his new skill work to his advantage several times, especially when he manages to think his teacher into becoming a toad. However, when he thinks how great it would be if his best friend were a dog and the inevitable happens, his ability to turn things back to their former state fails him. What follows is a series of comic situations as he tries desperately to conceal his friend

from his parents and stop him from being taken to the pound. Emily Rodda's *Crumbs!* is another transformation tale.

Comedy of chaos

Another type of situational humour can be termed comedy of chaos. According to Monahan (1971, p. 4), such comedy 'laughs in desperation at a world that has gotten out of control'. The television series 'M*A*S*H' and 'Fawlty Towers' are good examples of the comedy of chaos on screen.

In young adult fiction comedy of chaos can merge into black humour, which makes fun of things usually considered unpleasant or disturbing. This brand of humour is frequently misunderstood, especially by adults, whereas teenagers tend to appreciate its nightmarish comic potential. The anti-hero is a common feature of stories marked by black humour, and Max Orloff in Benjamin Lee's *It Can't Be Helped* is a typical specimen.

The book begins with Max attending his father's funeral — on the face of it a solemn occasion. Yet it is turned to high comedy as Max, who has been forced to wear a tight, ill-fitting suit, is asked to put earth on his father's grave. He misunderstands and thinks he must fill in the hole completely. As he heaves a heavy shovelful of clay, his foot slips and he is only saved from falling into the grave by someone grabbing hold of his pants. The resulting pain in a sensitive part of his anatomy is embarrassing for Max and hilarious for the reader.

Sally Odgers takes a look at comic chaos in *Three Loony Months*. Fourteen-year-old Justin Archer documents the chaos that his extended family endure one winter, with a counterpoint provided by his father George. Justin first discovers that his body is covered in red spots and then other disasters follow — such as a plague of wood-munching beetles. Sally Odgers never intends that the reader take any of the mishaps seriously, and each outlandish situation generates fresh amusement.

3 Humorous discourse

Incongruities in discourse can be appreciated by older children who command a certain sophistication of language and literary experience. Language play can take many forms, from nonsense talk to incisive forms of wit. As we have seen, young children usually enjoy nonsense language and odd-sounding or inventive words, and, as they grow older, linguistic ambiguities and challenges become more important to them. June Factor (1988, p. 182) notes that 'the ability to play with sound, sense, rhythm and metaphor, is characteristic of children's verbal lore', and so it's no wonder that they also enjoy books which play with the conventions and structure of language in a humorous way.

Spoonerisms

Spoonerisms (metathesis) are a form of word play much appreciated by children and adults alike. The term 'spoonerism' was coined after the Reverend W. A. Spooner, who often muddled his words by transposing their initial letters. The ingeniously designed *Spooner or Later* (Jennings, Greenwood & Denton) provides a heap of brain-teasing examples to decipher: for example, 'Caper over the page', which becomes 'Paper over the cage', or 'Send off a fax', which becomes . . . ?

The device Roald Dahl uses in *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke* is not strictly the spoonerism but it is closely related. What the innocent Vicar suffers from is 'back-to-front dyslexia' (the story was written for the benefit of the Dyslexia Institute), and he reverses words if he feels under pressure, with many embarrassing results. For instance, when asked by a female parishioner whether she should take a good gulp or just a little sip of communion wine, the Vicar replies:

'Dear lady, . . . you must never plug it! If everyone were to plug it the cup would be empty after about four goes and the rest of them wouldn't get any at all! What you must do is pis. Pis gently. All of you, all the way along the rail must pis, pis, pis. Do you understand what I mean?' (pp. 15–16)

No doubt this book exacerbates the concern some adults feel about the appropriateness of Dahl's books for children. It is, however, this very aspect of naughty wordplay which many children find appealing.

Name-calling

According to Beckman (1984), the most common type of humour amongst children turns on derogatory remarks and name-calling. Predictably it is exercised in many children's books, often at the expense of siblings and rivals. Judy Blume's *The Pain and the Great One* looks at how siblings see each other in terms of their parents' love and the nicknames they give each other. In *Freaky Friday* (Rodgers), Annabel refers to her brother as 'ape-face', while in *Three Loony Months*, mentioned just above, Justin calls his sister 'Sheepface' and his little brother 'The Pest'. The eponymous hero of *Lockie Leonard, Human Torpedo* (Winton) has quite a few names he calls members of his family, as when he takes the baby to nurse:

'She wants to sit on your lap, love,' Mrs Leonard said.
'Here, then.' Lockie reached up and took Blob under the arms.

She settled into his lap and then he went stiff all of a sudden.

'Oh no.'

'What?' said Philip.

'Moisture. Your trademark.'

'Eh?'

'Wet nappy, mudbrain. I must be the only person in this house who's heard of the toilet. Aaarrgh! Mum, get her off!' (pp. 7–8)

There are also books that use familiar children's name-calling in their titles, such as *The Twits* (Dahl), *Misery Guts* and *Worry Warts* (Gleitzman), *Princess Smartypants* (Cole) and *Bossyboots* (Cox).

Puns

Paul Jennings uses puns in the titles of some of his stories, not only as a device to lure the reader but also as a significant part of the story. In 'Smelly Feat' (from *Unbearable!*), it is Berin's incredibly smelly feet which are responsible for saving an old sea turtle from being killed by Horse and his gang. In order to make his feet even more putrid than usual, Berin wears several pairs of socks and doesn't change them (or his shoes) for three months — some feat! When, eventually, he takes them all off, the smell anaesthetises all the people in the town, including Horse's gang, thus frustrating their plan.

Puns are found in the text of many books for children and teenagers. For instance, in *Ramona the Pest* (Cleary), when Ramona is told by her first grade teacher to 'sit here for the present', she takes 'present' to mean 'gift'. Helen Cresswell is adept at using puns in *Ordinary Jack*, and Michael Rosen's versions of familiar stories in *Hairy Tales and Nursery Crimes* depend on the sort of punning variation of ordinary words which is foreshadowed in the title. One of the cleverest books with a sustained use of puns is *The Phantom Tollbooth* (Juster), though its sophistication tends to limit its appeal, even with upper primary children.

Slang

Slang and the imagery evoked by slang is another way of giving language a humorous twist. *Mallyroots' Pub at Misery Ponds* (Steele) provides comic stereotypes of the friendly Australian country family

and thrill-seeking American tourists, and the language and outlook of each group are amusingly juxtaposed. Pa Mallyroot's colourful expressions include 'Flatten the magpies' (p. 37) and 'Strangle the emus' (p. 43), while the abrasive but enthusiastic Hiram Rumbleburger has a more direct style of communication — as revealed in his conversation with the tourist agent, Mr Pilgrim:

> *'O.K., O.K. Get on that phone, bud, and say we'll take those two vacancies, arriving tonight.'*
>
> *Sheepishly, Mr Pilgrim shuffled his feet. 'Ah . . . not the phone, I'm afraid. You see, they only give a postal address . . . I expect they are not on the phone.'*
>
> *Mr Rumbleburger didn't know anyone who wasn't on the phone. 'How can they be not-on-the-phone?' he roared.* (p. 41)

Parody

Parody is a device whose appeal is usually restricted to older readers, since it relies on prior knowledge of the object being parodied (which might be a known literary work, a way of talking or a type of person). For instance, Scieszka's *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, a send-up of the familiar folk tale, is not generally understood by pre-school children but is thought very funny from about middle primary onwards. Objects of parody are often popular themselves, but sometimes the parody becomes more popular than the original. I suspect this may be the case with some children brought up on 'Sesame Street', for many of them recall these television versions of fairy tales rather than the more traditional tellings.

Conclusion

When readers begin to explore humorous literature, they are challenged to play with language, thus becoming more linguistically sophisticated. They are also invited to view people and their actions in ways which tend to reveal discrepancies between expectations and reality. They find the accepted order frequently turned upside down as they are presented with deviations from conventional social behaviour. Consequently humorous literature can be seen as quite subversive, demanding critical readers who do not passively accept what they read.

chapter three

A touch of humour often helps

The growth of realism

Narrative fiction asks its readers to participate in the events related and not merely sit back and allow the story to unfold as a spectacle or passing parade. It invites them to leave, temporarily, the primary world of the present and to engage with a secondary world of imagination. Ideally, by the end of the story, they should re-emerge into the real world feeling a little different from when they first entered the fictional world.

During the 1960s the genre of contemporary realism began making its presence felt in children's and young adults' literature. Bold attempts were made by authors from all parts of the world to challenge the content and style of existing reading materials for children and teenagers. A hallmark of this new genre was the frank and open style used to discuss 'real' issues. Gone were the taboos of the past, and gone too were previously held conceptions of childhood.

Now, in the '90s, some would argue that realism has gone too far. For example, an article in the *Sunday Age* (21 July 1991) posed the question, 'Are kids' books becoming too serious?' The author, Dianne Dempsey, questioned the proliferation of 'serious issues' books:

> *Does a character have to be serious and real in order to slip between hard covers? Does an author have to write about death,*

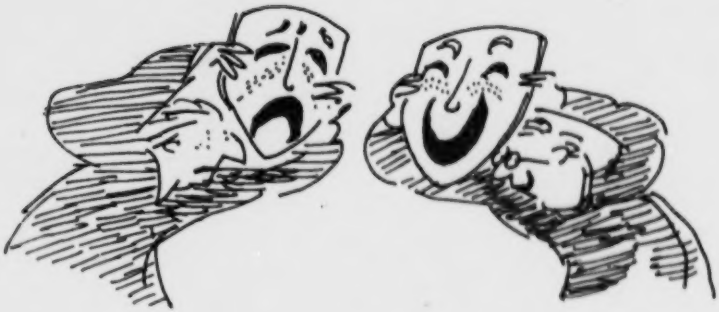
divorce or rainforests to be published? Such is the emphasis in children's writing these days that the genre of fantasy and fun seems to be taking a back seat.

Others would argue that these issues reflect the real world in which children are living and therefore have a rightful place in children's literature. Indeed, they say, one of the main reasons why children enjoy realistic fiction is because they can see themselves, or people like themselves, in the stories. To avoid writing about certain areas of lived experience simply because they are 'issues' would be an injustice to young readers and, worse still, create a false impression of the real world.

It is true that there is now little difference between the issues raised in children's books and those written about in adult books. AIDS, death, divorce, seduction, the occult, sexuality, various forms of abuse, nuclear holocaust, wars, poverty, psychological disturbances ... all of these issues, and more, have found their way into children's books. Some even appear in picture books — a genre which was once the province of the younger child. What distinguishes such books from adult books with similar themes is the treatment of the subject matter and the tone the author adopts. It is the responsibility of authors to make their stories manageable for the child and present them from a child's point of view. One way of helping to do this is to introduce moments of humour or passages of humorous tone.

Tragedy and comedy

Tragedy takes life seriously. Human experiences, thoughts and feelings are given high importance. Comedy, on the other hand, tries to dissipate and minimise the anxieties felt by the reader or audience. Life is not taken so seriously; comic characters are different from their tragic counterparts. For example, they are usually happy to compromise and they are not presented as heroes (though they may well earn heroic status by the end of the story). They have faults — they may, for instance, be vain, lazy, frivolous, clumsy or naive — but these faults are not fatal as, classically, are those of the tragic protagonist, and the reader or audience is able to laugh at the comic character's expense.



Although tragedy and comedy are distinct forms, they have long had a kind of symbiotic relationship and often interpenetrate each other. While many children's books deal with some element of tragedy — death of a central character, catastrophe, loss of innocence — the author will often include an element of comedy as a way of releasing the tension that has been building up in the reader. This comic relief helps to restore the reader's confidence and make him or her want to read on.

Humorous touches in dealing with serious matters

Two Weeks with the Queen (Gleitzman) tells the story of a boy whose little brother is dying of cancer. His parents wrongly, though innocently, assume that it is best for the boy, Colin, to be away during the final stages of his brother's life. They send him off to England to stay with an aunt and uncle he hardly knows. The separation is painful both for Colin and his brother, Luke. In England Colin decides that his brother needs the best doctor to help cure him and the best must be the Queen's own doctor. So begins a series of attempts to write to and visit the Queen to enlist her help.

This is also the story of Colin's journey from innocence to experience. It is his innocence which protects him from the cruel realities of his brother's situation. Whilst the adults around him realise that Luke is not going to live, Colin is blindly determined to prove them wrong and, in doing so, to restore harmony and the status quo. Finally, when he realises the situation for what it really is, he questions his own naivety:

But each time he went into a new ward, something struck him afresh. Something so obvious it would have made him shrug and say 'so what' if he'd been told about it a month before.

Now, each time he saw it, he felt a strange pang inside.

The sick people who had their families and loved ones around their beds all looked happier than the ones who didn't.

(p. 111)

Though *Two Weeks with the Queen* is told very much from Colin's point of view, Gleitzman cleverly makes the reader aware of the social, political and domestic issues inherent in the story through touches of humour in the reporting of dialogue and Colin's thoughts. One example, capturing Colin's sheltered view of life, occurs when he meets Ted for the first time. Ted is sitting on a kerb in the hospital grounds, sobbing with the knowledge that his lover Griff, who has AIDS, is dying:

Colin realised he'd never seen a bloke really blub. Kids, yes, but not an adult bloke. Adults put on brave faces and said, 'Mmmm, I'm starving.'

Colin wondered why this one wasn't.

He went over.

'You OK?' he asked.

The bloke looked up at him, startled.

'No, I'm not, I'm crying,' he said and looked away and sniffed and blinked a few times. When he looked back up at Colin he'd stopped crying. 'But ta for asking,' he said and grinned . . .

The bloke sniffed and wiped his eyes.

'I needed that,' he said.

Colin had only ever heard a bloke say that after a beer.

(p. 80)

Love Me Tender by Libby Hathorn is another story which has a serious theme and yet leaves both the reader and the main character, Alan, with feelings of optimism. Alan's mum has been going through another of her 'rough spots' and so has arranged for Alan and his brothers to stay with different relatives, while the eldest child, Desley, goes to help out at a Home. In the past it was Desley who looked after the younger children when their mum stayed in bed for

days, crying. But this time is different. They have been sent away thinking they are going on a holiday — a temporary separation. The harsh reality that their mother has taken off up north to live with another man, and may not be back, is not revealed for some time.

Alan, the happy-go-lucky one in the family, is sent off to live with stern Aunt Jessie, who has made martyrdom an art form. Alan's natural joie de vivre is dampened by a woman whose life is neat, ordered and humourless.

> *When I first came to live at my Aunt Jessie's house I tried everything I knew to make her laugh. I cracked jokes even though I didn't feel like it, I can tell you. I did the old walk-on-the-hands trick right across the loungeroom. Not easy over all those mats. I sang funny songs that used to make my mum laugh like mad. Without the rude words because Aunt Jessie hasn't any kids of her own.*
>
> *But I could soon see nothing was going to work.* (p. 1)

The underlying theme of this story is the power of laughter. Alan doesn't give up on this essential human response. He believes so strongly in its power that he is determined to make Aunt Jessie laugh. The stimulus for her finally succumbing to laughter and life is music, the rock'n'roll music played on the jukebox at the Boomerang Milkbar. Whilst this may be viewed as a nostalgic solution by an adult writer, Hathorn nevertheless avoids a Hollywood-style happy ending. Alan comes to realise that though people change, they remain essentially true to their natures.

Other Bells for Us to Ring by Robert Cormier is quite a departure from his earlier books, *The Chocolate War* and *Beyond the Chocolate War*, and was written for a younger audience. True, in all three books the central characters have such strong links with the Catholic Church and its doctrine that Catholicism is itself a major character. Yet while the earlier books project a sinister, bleak vision of the Church, *Other Bells* lets in the light and shows a more positive image — without sweetening or diminishing the strictness and mystery surrounding Catholic codes of behaviour.

Other Bells is partly about friendship, loyalties and allegiance. The setting is Massachusetts during World War II. Darcy Webster, a Protestant, becomes best friends with Kathleen Mary O'Hara, a

Catholic. Through their friendship Darcy learns about the mysterious and often bewildering rituals and practices of the Catholic Church. But she also learns the joys and demands of true friendship. The old adage that opposites attract holds true, for Darcy is cautious, conservative and self-conscious about her appearance, whereas Kathleen Mary is 'always at ease with the world, whether in dress, overalls, or hand-me-down pants' (p. 60). She has an inquisitive mind and confidently tackles the world head-on.

Cormier successfully tells Darcy's story of the friendship with the quizzical innocence and astuteness of a twelve-year-old girl. Kathleen Mary leads Darcy further into her spiritual world, but her personal world is not 'other people's business'. Darcy knows that Kathleen's father is a drunk who physically abuses his children, but the extent of his brutality is not disclosed for some time. It is as if the home lives of the children have no bearing on their away-from-home friendship — a friendship which fills the first half of the book with a blend of humour and pathos that is both persuasive and affecting.

Cormier's story has a number of serious themes: war and its effects on many aspects of people's lives, child and alcohol abuse, loneliness, death. Initially the seriousness is not overwhelming, and the interplay between the girls and the way they interact with their world bring the reader not only pathos and humour but an appreciation of childhood too. However, the tone becomes more sombre as the story moves on (although that movement is ultimately affirmative) and the gaiety of the first half is never recaptured. By the end Darcy feels ready to put her childhood behind her; she has learned much about the balance of opposites in human experience, and her developing wisdom is caught particularly sharply in one sentence:

> *Everyone laughed and I laughed, too, finding out for the first time how close laughing could be to weeping.* (p. 134)

A Season of Grannies by James Grieve is a story which explores the many facets of the life of sixteen-year-old Jacqui Barclay at a particular moment in time. An odd assortment of grannies, a two-faced boyfriend, understanding Looch (the new Italian boy at school), a hypercritical father and a wily old woman called Beryl all impinge

on Jacqui's life. They compete for her attention and loyalty and they all have conflicting expectations of her. The story explores serious and profound themes, such as euthanasia, exploitation and relationships, and yet Grieve manages to inject humour across a whole range of responses.

When Jacqui's father is conned repeatedly into taking on a granny for a day as part of a 'Rent-a-Granny' scheme, it is Jacqui who is left with the responsibility of looking after these eccentric and difficult women. Stereotypes are shattered, for Grieve shows the grannies as idiosyncratic individuals. There's cranky Mrs Gilbey who helps herself to the chocolate biscuits, the beer and the phone money; there's deaf Mrs Walker who manages to get herself locked in the toilet (which, after Jacqui's and Looch's attempts to rescue her, looks as though it has been hit by a commando attack); and finally there's sweet Dolly, with her trim figure and long blonde locks, who turns into a bald-headed pyromaniac.

Grieve manages to present both sides of the euthanasia debate. Although Beryl euthanases (without regret) her lover of forty years when his body is racked with pain from cancer, Jacqui wrestles with the moral dilemma. *A Season of Grannies* spins a tale which shows both sides of the tragedy/comedy coin. It is left to readers to decide where they stand in terms of the moral issues, but the tactful use of humour enables them to enjoy this story about real people and real needs.

Picture books

Over the past decade picture books have explored serious themes too. The '80s saw the beginning of books about grandparents, usually in terms of their relationship with a grandchild and ending with the death of one of them, as in Burningham's *Granpa*. Whilst these books are serious, the tone created by the illustrations is often a mixture of poignancy and light-hearted good humour. Frequently the choice of medium softens the impact of the words. For instance, in *Remember Me* (Wild & Huxley), Dee Huxley uses soft pastels to depict the rounded plumpness of the grandmother suffering from the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. The illustrations convey both the comic and tragic aspects of memory loss as the girl's grandmother leaves little name tags on furniture

and parts of the house — one even becomes attached to the back of her dress.

However, in many picture books which treat serious themes with some humour the purpose is predominantly satirical, and this particular use of humour is best examined in the next chapter, which is devoted to picture books.

Conclusion

Books given over to humorous situations and characters provide children with much appreciated sources of laughter. But there are other books which, though not a laugh a page or full of witticisms, can introduce them to more subtle forms of humour. Children need to be given more than the most obvious forms exploited by television sit coms, cartoons and children's shows. They need to see that even in life's more serious moments humour has its place — not humour of the belly-laugh kind, but the sort which shows that life can be viewed through different lenses.

chapter four

Picture book humour

Picture books enable the reader to explore humour at two different levels — the verbal and the visual. When the author is also the illustrator, the relationship between text and illustration is determined largely by one mind. When the author and illustrator are two different people, the potential for expansion of the original idea may be limited only by the imagination of the illustrator.

Some picture book illustrations simply support what the text tells us, while others tease or provoke us to look again, to see the joke or realise the contradiction. For, with their ability to carry one message in the text and another in the associated illustration, picture books offer particular opportunities for irony.

Rosie's Walk by Pat Hutchins is an example of dramatic irony: that is, *we* are aware of what's going on, but the characters, we suppose, are not. The text of this book is an extended sentence which gives a straight account of a walk around the farmyard by Rosie the hen. But the pictures reveal another story as well — the story of a fox stalking Rosie and the disastrous consequences of his attempts to catch her. The humour is entirely visual.

In her recent *Silly Billy*, Hutchins once again includes the reader in a little subterfuge. This time she has used her monster family characters to tell the story of an annoying little brother, Billy, who always wants to do what his big sister is doing. Billy's idea of 'play'

is to wreck everything. Finally, big sister employs some appropriate psychology and pretends to sleep in the toy box. Of course Billy wants to do the same. The parents and grandparents agree enthusiastically. At this point Hutchins shows Billy's family winking slyly to the reader. Only Billy is left unaware that he has been conned, but he is peacefully asleep.

Picture books for young children

Slapstick or banana-skin humour provides the basic ingredient of much humorous literature for children, and picture books for young children often rely on showing up life's funny moments. Their appreciation of this type of humour is often triggered by the visual realisation of what's happening; the pictures are the stimulus for their laughter, for 'seeing' the joke. Older readers are better able to visualise situations and so don't need to have them presented visually as well as verbally. However, characters must be presented in such a way that we laugh at them rather than sympathising with them. This doesn't mean that they must be obnoxious or evil, but to allow ourselves to feel too sorry for them will take the edge off the fun.

Michael Bond's recent small book series exploring further adventures of Paddington appeals to the young child's sense of fun. Each book focuses on a simple life-like incident, such as taking a bath, going shopping, baking a cake or going to the beach. In each case Paddington manages a mishap — on his shopping expedition he makes a mess of the store by dropping all his groceries onto the floor and over himself; in the kitchen he overdoes the ingredients for the cake so that it overflows from the oven and turns out to be much bigger than normal. Exaggeration of the basic idea, the innocence and incompetence of the childlike Paddington and the playful disasters that ensue are the sources of the humour.

John Burningham's Mr Gumpy books follow a similar path of mayhem and mishap, though not to such exaggerated conclusions. In *Mr Gumpy's Outing*, the inability of animals and children to sit still or be quiet for any length of time is the cause of the mishap — an overturned boat. In *Mr Gumpy's Motor Car*, Burningham has borrowed from *The Little Red Hen* to explore the theme of working together for the common good — in this case, pushing the car out of

the mud. Though at first all the animals and children have excuses for not helping to push, they eventually do so and their efforts are rewarded.

Animal characters

Animals as pets and as characters in their own right are popular topics in humorous picture books for young children. Pamela Allen's stories show her understanding of the young child. In *My Cat Maisie*, Andrew, like many young children, is too rough with his new pet, neither realising his own strength and nor taking into account the cat's view of things. He rides her like a horse, whizzes her round and round like a helicopter, slides down the banister with her like a fire engine and does amazing tricks and acrobatics with her on his bed. Needless to say, the cat is not impressed and soon leaves home, and Andrew is given his own taste of rough treatment when the playful, but very big, dog next door wants him to play *his* games. The unframed illustrations reflect the energy of young children, and plenty of white space on the page allows the reader to follow the story though the pictures as well as the words without distracting background details.

A cat who really wants to be a pet is the basis for *A Pet for Mrs Arbuckle* (Smyth & James). Mrs Arbuckle needs a pet and the gingernut cat needs an owner, though Mrs A. does not realise this

until the very end. This cat is no a dumb animal but displays an uncanny understanding of human nature. The humour comes largely from the novelty of the idea of interviewing potential pets and the logical reasons offered by the cat for rejecting other candidates. For example, when Mrs A. interviews a whale from California, the gingernut cat says:

> *'I suppose you realise that you'd have to pull down your house to make room for a pool, and then where would Mr A. watch TV?'*
>
> *'That would be a problem,' agreed Mrs Arbuckle.*
>
> *So they said goodbye to the whale —*

In *Counting on Frank* (Clement), the only character given a name is the boy's dog Frank, who, like his owner, always wears blue-tinted sunglasses. The boy, his parents and Frank appear to go through their lives in an unvarying round of television watching, shopping and eating — a routine which finds expression in a deadpan style of narration with a touch of sarcasm. The boy takes refuge in facts and delights in extending them by outlandish calculations, which are hilariously realised in the illustrations. For example, at the dinner table the boy remarks:

> *I enjoy dinner, not because of the delicious grill mum cooks EVERY night, or the thrilling conversation.*
>
> *It's the peas.*
>
> *If I had accidentally knocked fifteen peas off my plate every night for the last eight years, they would now be level with the table top.*

The family is pictured sitting at a table islanded in a sea of peas: the parents opposite each other, eating with some show of relish; Frank and the boy side by side, glumly contemplating their untouched plates.

The reader is given the impression that Frank is super-cool as he maintains an unfazed expression and manner throughout the book. The last page confirms this impression: Frank is revealed sitting in a seat in an aeroplane reading the newspaper. What's more, the mother has been left at home and her place in the plane is taken up by an abundant supply of canned dog food. This is one dog who not only enjoys the good life but has trained his owners well.

Wordless picture books

Wordless picture books (not to be confused with wordless concept or number books) tell a story solely through pictures. The title gives a context for reading the narrative, but wordless books still need to convey a unity as well as a continuous flow of action or idea. Arguably, however, they give more latitude for different responses and interpretations of the story by different readers than conventional picture books do.

Readers are given the opportunity to play a game, but in order to play they need to be aware of the visual conventions associated with the wordless book — just as readers of written texts need to be aware of literary conventions such as plot, characters, dialogue, implied author, etc. So, in making meaning from a sequence of pictures, the reader must attend to the choice of medium, style and colour, body language, aspects of setting, left-to-right progression, cause and effect, and so on.

Raymond Briggs' enduring fantasy *The Snowman* shows through comic strip format a small boy's night-time adventure with a snowman who comes to life. Humorous touches are achieved as the snowman explores the novelties of the boy's home, and the reader is able to feel both sympathy and amusement. The snowman is incompetent because he does not know about the boy's world, yet he is endearing because his incompetence is childlike.

John Goddall's story *Paddy's New Hat* uses alternating split-page and full-page illustrations to tell of the slapstick mishaps of Paddy the pig. Paddy has just bought himself a new hat when a gust of wind blows it off his head and into a police recruiting office. Poor Paddy is frightened into signing up and his career as a police officer begins. Despite numerous problems — including causing a major traffic jam and pile-up — Paddy becomes a hero when he captures a thief who has stolen the royal jewels.

A series of wordless picture books which explore the humour of slapstick are those by Mercer Mayer about a boy, a dog and a frog. These little books are filled with visual jokes as they relate the adventures of the three characters. The frog is the pivot for the humour, as it is through his mischievous yet innocent antics that the comical mishaps occur.

Pamela Allen's wordless picture book *Watch Me* sets up a relationship between the reader and the *Me* of the title before the book is opened. The title itself and the cover illustration alert the reader to pay attention to the child, who shows off inside the book by doing more and more daring tricks on his tricycle until the inevitable buster occurs. The humour of this story is on two levels. At one level, it takes on a carnivalesque form: the child is like a clown at the circus performing clever tricks on his bicycle. On the other level, the show-off gets his comeuppance, which, as in real life, provides the reader with satisfied amusement. *Watch Me Now* takes a second look at this dare-devil character.

An almost wordless picture book is Martin Handford's *Where's Wally?* There is a skeletal journey delineated by postcards from Wally to the reader at the top left of each double-page spread, but they really serve to direct the reader's attention to details in the kaleidoscopic visual imagery, and the spreads are largely independent of each other. The reader's first task is to find Wally in each picture, and then the game starts all over again with a search for the item of equipment that he's left behind in each location. But the lasting delight of the book is the teeming, often comic human incident on every page. While much of the humour is slapstick, there are many more subtly humorous touches too.

A more sophisticated predecessor of *Where's Wally?* (and possibly a model for it) is Mitsumasa Anno's wordless picture book *Anno's*

Journey. It too offers a feast of intricate detail in each double-page spread, challenging the reader to see stories within stories and to recognise cultural artefacts as diverse as Big Bird and Millet's *The Gleaners*. Indeed, much of the enjoyment of the book comes from recognition of these embedded stories and the teasing visual allusions to art, architecture, music, historical events and literary figures. However, exploring the book at this level of affectionate parody is best done with older children who have already experienced enough to appreciate the range of reference.

Satire in picture books

According to Nodelman (1988, p. 189), there is 'a long tradition behind the use of visual narrative for satiric purposes, beginning with Hogarth's depictions of the various failings of his own [eighteenth-century] society and including the comedies of the silent era of movies'.

Satire is more subtle than slapstick and other forms of explicit humour, and it is this subtlety which acts as an obstacle for many readers. Children need to be shown how to read satire, and teachers have an important role to play here. The first consideration is that underlying the humour is a serious point; the satirist's purpose is to criticise some aspect of human behaviour and show it up for what it really is. Devices that satirists use include irony, sarcasm, invective, ironic contrast and parody.

Anthony Browne's picture books deal with serious themes about values and personal relationships but contain visual jokes and improbable juxtapositions. They are social satires which are understandable for children from about nine years of age. *A Walk in the Park* and *Look What I've Got* explore the idea of social class. In both cases Browne avoids moralising while operating within a clear moral framework. His Magritte-like illustrations provide a bizarre brand of humour, often at a surrealistic level.

Willy the Wimp (and its sequel *Willy the Champ*) satirises popular notions of masculinity. Browne is really commenting on our society's obsession with physical beauty and stereotypes. Willy is all things that the 'nineties' man is supposed to be: sensitive, caring, gentle, forbearing. But he is called a 'wimp' by the 'suburban gorilla gang' and so decides to undertake a body-building course. He develops a

spectacular physique and an air of self-confidence, frightens away the suburban gorillas and wins the heart of sweet Millie. He walks away priding himself on his new stature — straight into a lamp post and apologises. Browne has used gorillas dressed as humans as a subtle shift of focus from the main targets (though the message is patently clear). The colourful illustrations provide a contrast of types, adding substantially to the humour.

In *The Piggybook*, full of explicit porcine humour, Browne explores in an openly didactic way female/male stereotypes in society. There is a fine line between the humour of the fantastic pictorial imagery and the seriousness of the message, and perhaps in this case the illustrations overwhelm the message — children may miss the point of the story as they become consumed with locating more humorous piggery images on every page.

Raymond Briggs was one of the earliest author-illustrators to explore through his picture books themes which were considered to belong to the adult world and have nothing to do with children. *Gentleman Jim*, *When the Wind Blows* and *The Tin Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman* make biting social comment. The latter is a powerful argument against war, created in the aftermath of the Falklands War. Briggs represents the two protagonists as crude and excessive cartoon characters whose actions are motivated by greed and love of power. As a poignant contrast to these colourful images, Briggs uses plain charcoal sketches of the returned soldiers, many with limbs missing. This change in medium jolts the reader back into looking at the consequences of a real war, as opposed to the cartoon conflicts which so many children are used to seeing.

In a recent book by Briggs, *The Man*, text and illustrations merge and at times compete for the reader's attention. It is their interplay rather than the story which is important. Briggs subverts conventional picture book narrative by presenting the reader with unresolved questions instead of a satisfactory resolution. Who is the man? Where does he come from? What's going to happen to him? There are also many issues on which to reflect: inequality, prejudice, dominance/subservience, independence/dependence, conflict/resolution. However, despite its philosophical nature, the book contains a lot of humour based on the incongruity of a tiny man in a 'normal-size' boy's world. At one point he uses a record stylus brush as a toothbrush —

although size is seen as a relative concept, the differences of scale present him with problems that demand creative solutions!

Parody

Through parody the satirist can arouse readers' latent feelings about a particular type of person or persuade them to reconsider conventional stereotypes. It is a device which assumes some familiarity with the object of mockery, and that may be one reason why parodies of traditional fairy tales have become popular over the past few years.

The Paper Bag Princess (Munsch & Martchensko) parodies those traditional fairy tales where the handsome prince rescues the helpless princess. In this case it is the princess who takes on the daring (and thankless) task of rescuing Prince Ronald. Ronald turns out to be a most ungrateful person who cannot accept Princess Elizabeth's dishevelled state and tells her to come back 'when you are dressed like a real princess'. She calls him a toad and the conventional ending is completely rejected as the story concludes, 'They didn't get married after all'. The final illustration shows a joyous and carefree Elizabeth dancing away into the sunset — alone.

Fiona French's *Snow White in New York* shifts the setting to New York in the speak-easy times of the 1920s and '30s. This shift from a traditional European rural setting to a big American city at a time of flourishing crime and corruption adds another dimension to the theme. Snow White is a blond-haired flapper and the seven dwarfs are seven jazz men. The motif of the magic mirror becomes the *New York Daily Mirror*, society's oracle. French has not only given her text the language of the time — 'Snow White's stepmother is the classiest dame in New York' — but her art deco illustrations support and extend the wit of the setting. This book demands repeated readings to explore the ways French has parodied literary, artistic and popular styles and images.

The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs (Scieszka & Smith) tells the familiar folk tale from the point of view of the wolf, who claims to be an innocent victim of circumstances. The reader is asked to reject the notion that the pigs died because of the wolf's carnivorous instincts and accept his case that all he wanted was to borrow a cup of sugar so that he could make his 'sweet old granny' a birthday

cake. The humour resides in the inversion of the plot and the alternative case presented; the reader laughs at the implausibility of the wolf's story because of previous knowledge of wolves in literature. The illustrations are a contrast to more familiar interpretations of the story (e.g. Galdone's), as they are dark and earthy rather than bright and colourful. They are humorous none the less: the wolf is shown as a rather dim-witted character, and the plump bottoms of the first two little pigs sticking out of the ruins of their homes not only look tempting for the wolf but bring peals of giggles from the young reader.

A picture book which employs irony, sarcasm, allusion and parody to achieve its satirical effect is *Ashe of the Outback* (Langoulant, Turton & Jorgensen). A comic strip format has been used to tell the story of Ashe, who becomes a hero despite being a hopeless fool. Society's desire to find new heroes and the role the media play in constructing legends are amusingly pointed up. The tongue-in-cheek style of the writing invites the reader to realise the ironic contrast between words and pictures: for example, the text tells us that after school 'Cuthbert Robertson Ashe naturally entered the field of aviation where he quickly climbed the ladder and swept all before him', while the accompanying illustration shows him in white overalls and cap standing on a ladder washing down the nose of an aeroplane. *Ashe on Parade* is a sequel.

Conclusion

As a genre, picture books have much to offer all readers. They can provide children and teachers with wonderful examples of literary styles and types of humour. However, the trend to use them as source books for learning to read and as examples of writing styles does create problems. An emphasis on their instructional potential can mean a de-emphasis on their value as something to enjoy. Teachers need to achieve a balance between instruction and delight (which need not be seen as mutually exclusive). And, in order to appreciate the full potential of humorous picture books, children need to be shown how different forms of humour can be conveyed through the interplay of words and images. After all, getting the joke is fundamental to all humour.

Humorous verse

The boy stood on the burning deck,
His feet were full of blisters;
The flames came up and burned his pants,
And now he wears his sister's.

(Covernton, *Vile Verse*, p. 9)

In just a few short lines poetry has the potential to capture comic effects in memorable form. Undoubtedly poetry for children and teenagers has changed over the years in terms of the range of subject matter and the language and format of poetry texts, yet it is notable that, according to Huck, Hepler and Hickman (1987, p. 414), 'in every preference study that has been done, children prefer narrative rhyme and humorous verse'. Many fortunate children first come into contact with this type of literature, in the form of nursery rhymes, when they are very young.

Nursery rhymes

Nursery rhymes have been passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation. They often tell stories in a very economical style, and many have humour as an underlying characteristic. There is nonsense humour in:

Dickery, dickery, dare,
The pig flew up in the air;

The man in brown soon brought him down,
Dickery, dickery, dare.

And verbal irony in:

A diller, a dollar,
A ten o'clock scholar,
What makes you come so soon?
You used to come at ten o'clock,
And now you come at noon.

Nursery rhymes also offer children the challenge and fun of riddles:

As I was going to St. Ives,
I met a man with seven wives.
Each wife had seven sacks;
In each sack were seven cats;
Each cat had seven kits.
Kits, cats, sacks, wives,
How many were going to St. Ives?

In addition to the nursery rhymes we have come to know as 'Mother Goose', other folk rhymes exist in most countries, often

with local geographical variations. *What Do You Feed Your Donkey On?* (O'Hare) is a collection of rhymes which 'have traditionally been recited or sung in Ireland'. They include playground or street chants and skipping-rope songs, such as:

> *Charlie Chaplin went to France,*
> *To teach all the cannibals how to dance,*
> *With a heel, toe, a burlie-o,*
> *Miss the rope, and out you go.*
>
> (p. 11)

Others are concerned with bodily functions:

> *Barney Hughes's bread,*
> *Sticks to your belly like lead,*
> *Not a bit of wonder,*
> *You rift like thunder,*
> *Barney Hughes's bread.*
>
> (p. 14)

Australia has produced its own folk rhymes — for example:

> *Of all the birds in Melbourne*
> *I'd like to be a sparra,*
> *So I could sit on Princes Bridge*
> *And help to fill the Yarra.*
>
> (Covernton, *Four and Twenty Lamingtons*, p. 17)

Others innovate on traditional rhymes and give them a local setting; here's an example from Max Fatchen:

> *Little Boy Blue went down to the beach*
> *With never a hat on his head.*
> *He sat in the sun*
> *Until, overdone —*
> *He turned into Little Boy Red.*
>
> (ibid., p. 40)

Some have a familiar self-deprecating humour:

> *Australian born,*
> *Australian bred;*

Long in the legs,
And thick in the head.
(ibid., p. 11)

Nonsense verse

Nursery rhymes, skipping songs and chants often go hand-in-hand with nonsense. This is a form of humour children enjoy, for, as Lukens (1990, p. 184) has pointed out: 'Nonsense plays upon our delight in the illogical and the incongruous, upon our pleasure in words cleverly used or misused, upon some secret yearning to see the immutable laws overturned'.

Some of Michael Rosen's 'revisions' of nursery rhymes in *Hairy Tales and Nursery Crimes* convert the originals into pure nonsense:

Hush-a-bye, gravy, on the tree top,
When the wind blows the ladle will rock;
When the bough breaks the ladle will fall,
Down will come gravy, ladle and all.
(p. 39)

Limericks, with their five-line structure and *aabba* rhyme scheme, are popular vehicles for nonsense; often the fifth line brings a surprise or some other form of humorous statement. Sound rhythm and good rhyming are essential to a successful limerick. Arnold

Lobel's *Book of Pigericks* is a light-hearted, whimsically illustrated collection of limericks about pigs:

> *There was an old pig with a clock*
> *Who experienced anguish and shock,*
> *For he greased it with butter,*
> *Which caused it to sputter*
> *And drowned both its tick and its tock.*
>
> (p. 25)

Nonsense verse often plays with words so that the reader is caught by surprise. Roger McGough's 'The Crazy Drummer' shows how this can happen:

> *Because*
> *he whipped up a storm*
> *in a band*
> *on a ship*
>
> *We all had to*
> *abandon ship.*
>
> (*Nailing the Shadow*, p. 61)

Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* is a cryptic nonsense tale with many invented words, as the opening stanzas reveal:

> *'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves*
> *Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;*
> *All mimsy were the borogoves,*
> *And the mome raths outgrabe.*
>
> *'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!*
> *The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!*
> *Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun*
> *The frumious Bandersnatch!'*

Ogden Nash's nonsense verse has stood the test of time and remains popular with both children and adults. His style is compact, and he uses the occasional made-up word to amusing effect:

> *The panther is like a leopard,*
> *Except it hasn't been peppered.*

Should you behold a panther crouch,
Prepare to say Ouch.
Better yet, if called by a panther,
Don't anther.

(Ferguson & Durkin, *That Awful Molly Vickers!*, p. 55)

Spike Milligan's 'On the Ning Nang Nong' has been popular with pre-school children for decades:

On the Ning Nang Nong
Where the Cows go Bong!
And the Monkeys all say Boo!
There's a Nong Nang Ning
Where the trees go Ping!
And the tea pots Jibber Jabber Joo.

(*Silly Verse for Kids*, p. 39)

Margaret Mahy's writing is characterised by her zany humour, lively imagination and clever word play. This is evident in 'Bubble Trouble' — a poem which begs to be read aloud, as the first stanza shows:

Little Mabel blew a bubble and it caused a lot of trouble . . .
Such a lot of bubble trouble in a bibble bobble way.
For it broke away from Mabel as it bobbed across the table,
Where it bobbled over Baby, and it wafted him away.

(*Bubble Trouble and Other Poems and Stories*, p. 1)

Breaking taboos

June Factor (1988, p. 160) has noted that children's enjoyment of vulgar and obscene forms of humour is a universal phenomenon. Collectors of children's folklore, such as Turner, the Opies and Factor herself, have revealed children's delight in exploring topics regarded as taboo by adults. Children's vulgar rhymes include jokes, stories, parodies, tongue twisters and riddles. Often figures from popular culture are the focus; at other times world leaders or sacred icons, such as the Bible or the Pope, are the targets.

In recent years collections containing these vulgarlore and other folklore rhymes have appeared on library shelves. This may indicate a more tolerant attitude by publishers and the general public in

allowing what is essentially an oral tradition to appear in print. However, it does not mean that acceptance is universal, for, as Culley (1991, p. 66) has observed: 'Adult literature is unrestrained but children's literature, when it reflects much of children's culture in its use of vulgarity, is found offensive by *adults*'. Roald Dahl's books reveal quite clearly his contempt for this type of adult hypocrisy. Many of his adult characters are irresponsible and cruel and dislike children, whereas the child protagonists often emerge as victors despite oppression by parents, teachers and other adult authority figures. However, in his verse as in his prose, Dahl relies on an irreverent humour to guy his targets and soften the impact of grisly events.

The series of anthologies compiled by Jane Covernton, *Putrid Poems*, *Petrifying Poems* and *Vile Verse*, has proved very popular with children, who find the poems' earthy and often gross humour appealing. Janeen Brian's 'Fly-blown' is an example of the latter:

I sniffed a fly
Right up my nose,
I'm sure it wasn't keen.
I blew and blew
And out it flew,
A gluey, glossy green!

(Covernton, *Vile Verse*, p. 75)

The mildly subversive nature of many poems for children today is an indicator of social change. However, children's enjoyment of rhymes and jokes about underpants and toilets is not a modern phenomenon; it seems as if they have long had a taste for mild scatological humour. According to Iona and Peter Opie, children's rhymes about underpants can be traced back to the nineteenth century when a music hall singer called Lottie Collins sang 'Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay' in a revue. The following version became part of the youth culture of the time:

Lottie Collins has no drawers.
Will you kindly lend her yours?
She is going far away
To sing Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!

(Opie 1977, p. 128)

Roald Dahl obviously knew what would appeal to his readers, for, in his version of 'Little Red Riding Hood', the little girl 'whips a pistol from her knickers' and shoots the wolf (*Revolting Rhymes*, p. 40). When I spoke to a class of eight- and nine-year-olds about Dahl, they proffered this line as one of the funniest he had written.

Roger McGough showed an equally shrewd understanding of his readers when he titled one of his poems 'A Poem with Knickers in It'. However, what the reader finds is not a risqué rhyme but a gentle piece about two trees with daffodils encircling their base 'like frilly yellow knickers' (*Nailing the Shadow*, p. 32). The slightly naughty couplet 'P's and Q's' is another example of McGough's witty word play, and shows verse in its most economical form:

> *I quite often confuse*
> *My quees and my poos.*
>
> (ibid., p. 48)

McGough's appeal lies also in the subjects he selects. In 'The Lesson', for instance, he takes a black humour approach to the issue of corporal punishment in schools (*You Tell Me*, pp. 19–20).

Brian Patten's *Thawing Frozen Frogs* is a diverse collection, ranging from nonsense verse to straightforwardly serious poems. Patten deals with issues of real concern to him, such as conservation and animal liberation, but usually injects an element of earthy humour into his treatment. 'Bits and Pieces', for example, approaches the experience of death and grief with a gay irreverence; it tells how, after Uncle Fredrick's demise, the family assembled his 'spare parts':

> *We set out to find them.*
> *It caused no great alarm*
> *To find in the cupboard*
> *His artificial arm.*
>
> *'Three cheers for Uncle Fredrick!'*
> *Was the merry mourners' shout.*
> *'We've found a bit of Fredrick.*
> *Now there's less to grieve about.'*
>
> (p. 60)

Doug MacLeod's collection of witty tales from behind the cloisters in *Sister Madge's Book of Nuns* invites the reader to take a look at

some surprising characters. There's Sister Bossy who, after a lifetime of bossing others, finds that she is given some of her own medicine when she tries to enter heaven. An angel who once asked in vain for Sister Bossy's help is now the keeper of the heavenly gates:

'Well, I've got news for you, my dear,
Now I'm *the brand new bouncer here.*
You think you're coming in? You're not!
You're going someplace rather hot.

'That's right!' the angel shook his wings
'I'm sending you to Alice Springs!'

(p. 6)

Other nuns are equally amusing: there's Sister Isobel, who conducts interesting class excursions where students get to experience child-eating animals at first hand, and Sister Stephanie, who has a pet vulture called Charlie and her own bikie gang:

The gang was fierce, the gang was mad
The gang was old and leather clad
With chains and crosses, clubs and spikes
The nuns revved up their superbikes.

(p. 22)

Performance poets

Whilst children take to poetry with apparent ease, teenagers and adults tend to be less enthusiastic. Some consider poetry elitist. Perhaps this attitude harks back to the way poetry was 'taught' in high schools for many years. Today, however, it seems that poetry is enjoying a revival of popular interest. Performance poets, who traditionally inhabit inner-city pubs, cafes and clubs, are now touring schools, and from all accounts even the high school students are lapping it up.

Komninos and Steven Herrick are two performance poets who have put out books of their work (*Komninos* and *Water Bombs* respectively). Thoughtful consideration has been given to format and layout, which lends the poems life on the page and encourages the reader to give voice to the words. *Komninos* also comes with an audiocassette of the poet reading, which is the next best thing to experiencing a live performance. Komninos' poems reflect daily experience and many reveal humorous insights. Here's the beginning of 'the baby wrap':

> *well you hear a little grizzle*
> *and you slowly unwrap*
> *the bundle that is crying*
> *in a heap on your lap*
> *and you unwrap carefully*
> *'cos it could be a trap*
> *it wouldn't be the first time*
> *he's had a mishap*
>
> *the bundle could let loose*
> *with a bum like a tap*
> *that will spray you with poo*
> *at the drop of a hat*
> *splattering the mustard*
> *on your clothes, on the mat*
> *so you are ever so careful*
> *how you unwrap . . .*
>
> (p. 41)

Komninos is able to direct his wit both at contemporary society and his own ethnicity. 'Superwog' is a light-hearted comment about a Greek fishmonger's battle to survive against competing American take-aways, while 'if i was the son of an englishman' is a satirical jab at those Australians who cling to a colonial mentality.

Illustrated verse

Poetry books, like picture books, are undergoing a metamorphosis in format, design and content, and there has been a welcome trend to add illustrations in recent years. Whether these illustrations are photographic, or take the form of humorous pen and ink sketches (like those of Quentin Blake), or more painterly interpretations (like those of John Anthony King), the fact remains that many publishers *are* producing illustrated poetry books and anthologies. Partly this is a marketing strategy to attract readers, but illustrations can also add another dimension to the humour inherent in the text.

Of course some writers like Dr Seuss and Spike Milligan provided their own illustrations long ago, but now well-known illustrators such as Craig Smith, Peter Viska, Michael Foreman, Charles Keeping, Tomi Ungerer and Tomie de Paola are being commissioned to illustrate other poets' works. Indeed, in the case of Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake, the partnership has been so successful that it has

become impossible to imagine many of Dahl's rhymes and stories without thinking of Blake's illustrations.

The comical illustrative styles of Kilmeny & Deborah Niland and Quentin Hole have contributed to a resurgence of interest in the narrative poems of A. B. Paterson. In *Mulga Bill's Bicycle*, the humour of situation and character is presented as successfully in the Nilands' pictures as in the words. In *The Man from Ironbark*, Hole's illustrations have more a supportive role, but he has introduced a cat (not present in the text) which plays the part of witness and at times conspirator in the actions of the human characters.

Record companies realised years ago the wisdom of including the lyrics of pop songs on record covers, most of which are of course strongly illustrated. Like the ballads of the past, these lyrics are sung by all who choose to remember them. Their language appeals to young people and they are accepted as poetry. Graham Beattie, managing director of Ashton Scholastic, has expressed a belief (1992) that more picture books of song lyrics will be appearing in bookshops. However, it is perhaps indicative of our recessionary times that many of today's songs are serious: humorous lyrics are rapidly becoming a thing of the past — at least for the teenage and adult markets. Recordings for pre-school children often feature humorous songs, but even these may raise issues of conservation, pollution and animal welfare. Nevertheless there is a place for humorous lyrics as a form of printed verse, and only time will tell how long it takes for them to appear in picture book form.

chapter six

The changing face of humour in children's literature

The Herdmans were absolutely the worst kids in the history of the world. They lied and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and talked dirty and hit little kids and cussed their teachers and took the name of the Lord in vain and set fire to Fred Shoemaker's old broken-down toolhouse.

(Robinson, *The Worst Kids in the World*, p. 9)

As readers are led into the Herdman world of chaos and rule breaking, neglect and solidarity, they cannot help laughing along the way. It may seem heartless to laugh at others' misfortunes, but the truth is that most of us have been conditioned to laugh at uncomfortable aspects of the human predicament ever since we were very young and responded to the hapless adventures of Jack and Jill, Humpty Dumpty and the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe. And, just as we can better understand our own sense of humour by becoming aware of the cultural values which have helped to shape it, so too can we better understand the nature of current humorous literature for children by becoming aware of its antecedents. For it is a truism, neatly restated by Huck, Hepler and Hickman (1987, p. 96), that 'the literature of one generation builds on the literature of past generations'.

Humour in early children's books

'Childhood' as we have come to know it is a relatively recent Western phenomenon. Children's books written prior to the eighteenth century were largely didactic in tone and moralistic in purpose. The instructive adult narrator of these early works stands in sharp contrast to the child narrator of many of today's books, which generally present a child's point of view. Earlier books broadcast an adult point of view; children were seen as miniature adults who needed to be indoctrinated with the values, beliefs and customs of adult society. Accordingly the books had a clear mandate.

The Puritan influence which gripped England and the American colonies in the seventeenth century allowed little scope for humour. Nevertheless there were outlets for a less sombre approach to story in the form of chapbooks — cheap booklets with crude woodcuts which have been termed the forerunners of today's comics. With

their tales of adventure, romance and humour, they offered readers a light alternative to the religious books of the Puritans. Then, during the eighteenth century, Mother Goose rhymes became popular in both Europe and America, providing children with many comical characters and incidents and displaying many different types of humour. Some originally carried political messages intended to sway adult opinion, much as political cartoonists attempt to today.

Nonsense verse emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Edward Lear's funny limericks and humorous illustrations in *A Book of Nonsense* (1846) still hold their appeal for children:

> *There was an Old Man on whose nose most birds of the air could repose;*
> *But they all flew away at the closing of day,*
> *Which relieved that Old Man and his nose.*

Lear's verse paved the way for modern poets such as Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky, Spike Milligan and Max Fatchen.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw many changes in the types of books produced for children in Britain and America, and in Australia. American Mark Twain wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), both told from the point of view of a child narrator whose innocent reports on adult society serve to satirise that society (Stahl 1990). In England the first notable story to be written purely for children's enjoyment was Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). Carroll introduced children to such mad and memorable characters as the White Rabbit, who declared 'Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!' and checked his fob watch; the Red Queen, who would scream indiscriminately 'Off with her head!'; and the March Hare and Mad Hatter, who spoke in riddles and had a tea party — without tea!

However, despite Carroll's attempts to write for a younger audience, children have often found *Alice in Wonderland* too difficult. Its appeal lies more with adults, who see it as a text for academic study and debate as well as a source of bizarre humour. On the other hand, it has survived all these years (though the influence of the Disney film version and book spin-offs should not be underestimated), and many children will have at least a fleeting knowledge of its characters and nonsense rhymes — such as:

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
How I wonder what you're at!
Up above the world you fly,
Like a tea-tray in the sky.

(p. 46)

Australian writers, influenced by their English peers, wrote traditional fairy stories and fantasies which tried to capture the humorous vein of such books as Carroll's. According to Dunkle (1980, p. 23), within a decade Australia had its own imitation of *Alice in Wonderland* in the shape of *Bertie and the Bullfrogs*, written by John Howard Clark for the 1874 Christmas edition of the *Adelaide Observer*, and acknowledged as the first Australian story 'wholly concerned with bringing pleasure, not edification, to young readers'. Another Christmas publication (five years later) was the first *Cole's Funny Picture Book*, advertised on the cover as 'the funniest picture book in the world'. Like its successors, it contained a collection of verse, riddles, stories and illustrations (often plagiarised), which brought endless fun to generations of Australian children — as well as providing bookseller Cole with a golden outlet for advertising his wares.

Ethel Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899) was also written for children's enjoyment and is clearly indebted to *Alice in Wonderland* for its mixture of styles (prose and verse), its trial scene, and the 'topsy-turvy viewpoint' (Wighton 1963). The following extract is a sample of the whimsical conversations between Dot and her animal characters which are so reminiscent of those between Alice and her Wonderland characters:

> *'I was thinking,' said Dot.*
>
> *'Oh, don't think!' pleaded the Kangaroo; 'I never do myself.'*
>
> *'I can't help it!' exclaimed the little girl. 'What do you do instead?' she asked.*
>
> *'I always jump to conclusions,' said the Kangaroo, and she promptly bounded ten feet at one hop.* (p. 5)

Despite the obvious imitations, *Dot and the Kangaroo* remains a landmark in Australian children's literature for its portrayal of Australian fauna and bush settings and the relationship between the animals and their environment.

Australian humour

Australian humour has long tended to take a larrikin and irreverent attitude to those in authority or representative of high culture. The sense of a democratic tradition, of a rallying of support for the underdog or the working-class man or woman is characteristic of Australian writing, especially Australian comedy, and is a product of our history and lack of an aristocratic tradition. Examples of this type of humour are to be found in C. J. Dennis' *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915), where one poem makes fun of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo is some 'barmy goat' who swallows lysol so that he can die alongside his 'tart' Juliet. This book, though not written for children, is well received by high school students, who appreciate its mocking use of Australian slang.

Early Australian humorous tales centred around convicts, stockmen, squatters, bullockies, swagmen, bushrangers and shearers, with the bush providing the setting. Many of these stories were from the oral tradition and few were really accessible to children, though there were exceptions of course, such as Henry Lawson's 'The Loaded Dog', first published in 1901.

Ethel Turner, who wrote the first notable Australian family story, *Seven Little Australians* (1894), openly acknowledged her beliefs about children in the Foreword:

> *In England and America and Africa and Asia the little folks may be paragons of virtue; I know little about them. But in Australia a model child is — I say it not without thankfulness — an unknown quantity . . . There is a lurking spirit of joyousness and rebellion and mischief in nature here, and therefore in children.*
>
> (quoted in Townsend 1990, p. 61)

Turner's book provided for the first time a picture of urban Australian life which had its own uniqueness and appeal. Despite the often harsh realism of the presentation, its characters maintained a certain level of humour, much to the delight of readers.

Many of the early books for children emphasised the idea of Australians coming to terms with the environment and the promotion of an Australian identity. Humour was essentially based on the mateship idea and the practical jokes played on those who didn't fit into the accepted social setting. This is evident in Mary Grant

Bruce's saga of the Linton family in the Billabong books, where the 'true blue' characters, Norah, Jim and Wally, are contrasted sharply with outsiders like Lee Wing, the Chinese gardener. For instance, in one 'humorous' episode in *A Little Bush Maid* (1910), Jim ties Lee Wing's pig tail to a chair when he sees it hanging over the side of the bed. This kind of humour is best understood if it's put into the social and political context of the time, when Australia's xenophobic feeling towards Asians was running high.

Beginnings of the picture book

After the First World War, several publications for children emerged showing a clear preference for amusement and illustration. They included *The Magic Pudding* (1918) by Norman Lindsay, *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* (1918) by May Gibbs, *A Book for Kids* (1921) by C. J. Dennis, and *Blinky Bill and the Quaint Little Australians* (1933) by Dorothy Wall. All these books have undergone many reprints and are still available today. *The Magic Pudding* is a satire poking fun at authority figures. Much of its appeal lies in the absurdity of the idea of 'a cut-an'-come-again Puddin'' and in the humorous dialogue and witty songs. The cantankerous Puddin' has a predilection for acerbic ditties. For example, Bill Barnacle tells Bunyip Bluegum that the Puddin' enjoys offering a slice of himself to strangers, which Bunyip thinks is very polite of him. The Puddin' replies:

> *'Politeness be sugared, politeness be hanged,*
> *Politeness be jumbled and tumbled and banged.*
> *It's simply a matter of putting on pace,*
> *Politeness has nothing to do with the case.'*
>
> (p. 20)

However, it was not until 1970 and the publication of *Waltzing Matilda* with illustrations by Desmond Digby that Australian picture books really sprang into life (Saxby 1993, p. 77). Since then they have gone from strength to strength, with humour continuing to be the dominant focus. Some more recent examples, such as Morag Loh's *Kinder Hat* (1985) and Libby Gleeson's *Where's MUM?* (1992), reflect changing social structures and attitudes — indeed it could be argued that the visual dimension of the picture book makes it a more responsive vehicle than the novel for registering social change.

'New Realism': finding a place for humour

After 1945 Australia entered a period of post-war reconstruction. Increased industrialisation and a shift of population from rural areas to the cities meant that Australian society was undergoing marked changes. Stories with urban settings began to take their place alongside their rural counterparts. Concern with a physical landscape began to be replaced by concern with an inner landscape — the inward-looking 'problem' novel was born (Saxby 1971).

Whilst children's stories reflected the 'new realism', humour was not submerged. Colin Thiele successfully combined realism and humour in *The Sun on the Stubble* (1961), *February Dragon* (1965) and *Blue Fin* (1969), and other writers in the 1960s produced memorable humorous books. S. A. Wakefield's *Bottersnikes and Gumbles* (1967) is an absurd story which exploits word play and a sense of the ridiculous, and children continue to enjoy its verbal and visual humour. Likewise Randolph Stow's clever study in irony, *Midnite: The Story of a Wild Colonial Boy* (1967), still offers much in the way of humour at different levels. There is slapstick, farce, verbal play and send-ups of Australian artistic and literary icons (such as McCubbin's *Bailed Up* and Patrick White's *Voss*) and of legendary heroes like Ned Kelly.

More recent novels have explored aspects of humour which produce anything from wry smiles to hearty guffaws. Australian writers such as Max Fatchen, Max Dann, Robin Klein, Tim Winton, Doug MacLeod, Maureen Stewart and Pamela Allen have continued to explore the bounds of humour across all fictional genres. America and Britain have produced many fine writers of humorous fiction: for example, Lois Lowry, Beverly Cleary, Barbara Robinson, Judy Blume, Helen Cresswell, Anne Fine, Paula Danziger, Gene Kemp and Roald Dahl. Like their Australian counterparts, these writers have provided readers with memorable characters who face life's challenges with humour and ingenuity.

Conclusion

Since the beginnings of humorous literature for children, there have been huge leaps in terms of sophistication, content and style. Undoubtedly some humour has dated. Stories which portray Victorian children's mischievous antics would hardly raise a smile with today's

more assertive and liberated child. History, environment and prevailing social and political attitudes all play a part in shaping the types of humour that are written and appreciated, and they need to be discussed when earlier examples of humorous literature are being shared with students, in order to broaden their appreciation of our literary heritage.

Australia's face is changing, and so too is Australian humour. No longer are children exposed to only one particular brand of imported humour in their books, or a particularly localised type. Today's books for children and young people present a myriad of faces and outlooks on life. All help to ensure that laugh lines will be firmly etched on the faces of this and future generations.

Exploring humour in the classroom

This chapter presents a variety of practical activities, based on the discussion of humour in previous chapters, which teachers can use in the classroom as a means of exploring concepts of humour and humorous texts. They will suit a range of classes from middle primary to lower secondary levels, though they should of course be selected and adapted to suit teachers' own purposes and the needs and interests of their students.

The activities are varied in terms of approach: some are open-ended and do not refer to any specific texts; others are more directly related to texts. In most cases suitable titles are suggested, but if copies of these are unavailable, alternatives can be used. Underlying all the activities is a conviction that literature should be enjoyed, so that close scrutiny which threatens to overtake enjoyment is undesirable.

Comic strip format

SUITABLE TITLES
Ashe of the Outback and *Ashe on Parade* by Allan Langoulant, David Turton and Norman Jorgensen
The Snowman and *Father Christmas* by Raymond Briggs

OTHER MATERIALS
Newspaper comic strips
Comic books

- Invite students to bring along their favourite comic strips/books to share. See if they can pinpoint the types of humour exemplified in them. A list of suggestions can be compiled on the board: e.g. slapstick, jokes, violence, name-calling, visual humour . . .

Ask students to white out the dialogue in one of the comic strips and replace it with their own.

Students can write and illustrate their own comic strips, employing one or more of the humorous elements discovered in their comics. The finished comic strips can be displayed on a bulletin board.

- Read *The Snowman* and ask students to prepare a script for it.

Groups of students can prepare a play based on a humorous episode from *Father Christmas.*

Have students select a humorous book and turn one episode into a comic strip.

- Collect political cartoons for a week. Identify the current events or people being satirised. Discuss the ways satirists get across a serious message through humour.

Have students decide on their own current issue or target and prepare a political cartoon for a newspaper.

- Students can select one comic strip which appears in a daily newspaper and cut it out every day for a week. Have them consider:

  Why is it funny?
  What are the characters like?
  Do the characters remind me of anyone I know?
  Is there a common theme in each strip?

- Ask students to read one of the Ashe books in small groups. Discuss how the authors have used irony by examining contradictions between what the text tells and what the pictures show.

Puns

> A pun is a verbal joke depending on a word that has two or more meanings, or a word used in a context which makes the reader think of another word which sounds like it.

- Collect as many books as possible with puns in their titles and ask students what are the two meanings of the key words (refer to bibliography for a selection of titles).

Have students devise their own pun titles.

Have students convert familiar book titles to pun titles: e.g. *The Pain and the Grape One, Malice in Wonderland, Bertie and the Pear.*

- Ask students to collect as many puns as they can find being used by advertisers in different media — for clothing, drinks, household cleaners, etc. Create a pun display in the classroom.

Ask students to use puns in designing their own slogan to promote a product.

- As a class compile a list of words which have more than one meaning or different words which sound the same. Encourage students to use a dictionary to find or check on unfamiliar words.

Tall tales

A tall tale relies on exaggeration to achieve comic effect.

SUITABLE TITLES

Tales from the Speewah by Maureen Stewart
The Tall Book of Tall Tales by Jean Chapman

Uncle Lemon's Spring by Jane Yolen
The Little Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly Traditional
McBroom's Wonderful One Acre Farm by Sid Fleischman

Read several tall tales from different countries, as suggested above, and discuss with students why they think they are called 'tall tales'. Could they be true?

Recall/record some exaggerated descriptions from the stories.

Invite students to make drawings of some of the characters which literally reflect what is written about them.

Look for examples of tall tales today (e.g. in newspapers, fishing stories, stories told in the playground and so on).

Have the class prepare their own exaggerated descriptions using similes and metaphors — for example:

he was as tall as a church steeple
her voice could cut steel at a hundred metres
his teeth were as sharp as broken glass
her nose was as pointy as a witch's hat.

Satire

Satire ridicules folly and viciousness. It is often persuasive, relying upon several devices: irony, sarcasm, invective, ironic contrast and parody.

SUITABLE TITLE
The Tin Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman by Raymond Briggs

Read the book and explain the background of the Falklands War to the students. Photographs of Mrs Thatcher and General Galtieri will give them a frame of reference for the characters.

Topics for discussion
Do you think this book is for or against war? Why?

Briggs has employed two distinct illustrative styles — charcoal drawings and gaudy caricatures. Why do you think he has done

this? How effective is this contrast of styles and media in creating humour, mood and characterisation?

What is Briggs saying about politicians? How would you describe the main characters presented in this book?

Briggs shows the childishness of the two protagonists by means of childish expressions and temper tantrums:

> *'It's MINE!' she screeched. 'MINE! MINE! MINE! I bagsied it AGES ago! I bagsied it FIRST! DID! DID! DID!'*

How is language used (in particular tone) to achieve ironic effects?

Parody

> A parody can be colloquially described as a 'send-up'. Parody is a variety of satire, but often the object of parody is regarded with some affection.

SUITABLE TITLES
Versions of *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel* and *The Sleeping Beauty*
Prince Cinders and *Princess Smartypants* by Babette Cole
The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch
Revolting Rhymes by Roald Dahl
The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka
Four and Twenty Lamingtons compiled by Jane Covernton
'All Things Dull and Ugly' by Michael Rosen in *Culture Shock*

Ask students to recall/view television shows such as 'M*A*S*H', 'Inspector Gadget' or 'Get Smart' and discuss how the writers have ridiculed the behaviour of certain people (e.g. doctors, detectives, army officers).

These shows also parody the genre which they imitate — war films, formula detective shows — and 'Inspector Gadget' takes the process one step further by parodying the parody. Discuss how the use of a cartoon format allows the creators even more freedom in going over the top. For example, Max Smart's telephone shoe has been extended to include the incredible feats which Inspector Gadget can perform with his own body — hence his name.

Recall with students familiar fairy tales such as *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Identify the stereotypical patterns to be found in relationships between male and female characters and compile a list of these sex-role characteristics.

Consider the plot structure and style of the stories and record their common features. List the words and phrases that appear frequently in story openings and endings, and in the description of characters.

Now, in groups, read *Prince Cinders*, *Princess Smartypants* and *The Paper Bag Princess* and consider the ways in which the original stories have been ridiculed. What features of the genre have the authors retained? How have they deviated from the genre?

Read 'Little Red Riding Hood' in *Revolting Rhymes* and *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, which both parody popular fairy tales. Discuss the ways in which the writers have changed the point of view presented in order to reconstruct the stories.

Students can write their own parodies of popular fairy tales, perhaps in the form of newspaper articles.

Read selections from *Four and Twenty Lamingtons* and 'All Things Dull and Ugly' and discuss how the poets have parodied poetic forms.

Students can compose their own nursery rhyme parodies.

Older students may like to read selected classical poems, such as Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess', Shakespeare's 'Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?' or Thomas Gray's 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat', and compose their own parodies. Of course they must be familiar with the structure and conventions of a particular poetic form before they attempt to parody it.

Humorous poetry

Search the newspapers for comical photographs. Invite students in groups of three to select one and write a short humorous poem about it.

In groups or pairs, students can compose a humorous poem and then take one photograph to reflect and/or enhance the humour.

Limiting them to one photograph challenges them to think carefully about what would be the most appropriate aspect of the poem to capture — a useful exercise in visual literacy. If all the photographs are displayed, the students can devise humorous captions for everyone's except their own. The poems with their accompanying photographs can then be shared orally with the class. (N. B. If the photographs are black and white, they can be easily converted to overhead transparencies.)

- Students in groups can be encouraged to put together a collection of their favourite humorous poems on audiotape. They can select appropriate sound effects or music and present their poems in a combination of solo and group readings.

This exercise has a threefold purpose: firstly, students need to read widely to locate poems and have to think of their selection in terms of contrast and/or compatibility of subject, tone, pace and style; secondly, they need to select or compose appropriate music or sound effects and to rehearse speaking the poems clearly; thirdly, since poetry appeals especially to the ear, they must always keep in mind the sharing of the tapes with other students, which is the culmination of the activity.

- Concrete poetry involves arranging words to form pictures. Students often enjoy this form of poetry because of its visual impact. They can experiment with it using a single word or repeats of a single word or a limited number of words on the topic 'Humour'.

Similes and metaphors

A simile is a brief comparison usually introduced by the preposition *like* or the conjunction *as*. Similes are used to clarify an unfamiliar idea or abstract concept, to amplify a description, to express feelings or to entertain.

A metaphor is also a comparison. The difference is that a simile compares things by stating that one thing is *like* another, while a metaphor says that they are the *same* thing.

Humorous fiction often contains figurative language. Simile and metaphor reveal a writer's wit and add to the reader's enjoyment.

Ask students to bring to class fridge magnets, greetings cards, cartoon strips, etc. which contain metaphoric definitions. Charles Schultz, the creator of *Peanuts*, has quite a few examples, such as 'Happiness is a Warm Puppy'. Students can share the ones they've been able to find and discuss the ways the metaphors have been used. They can compose their own metaphoric definitions for words associated with humour: e.g. laughter, joy, fun, comedy.

Many clichés are overworked similes and metaphors: e.g. *cool as a cucumber, dead as a doornail, gentle as a lamb, Mother Nature, white as snow.* Invite students to add to this list.

Explain that writers should aim to use fresh and original similes and metaphors rather than tired and trite ones. Read books by Paul Jennings, Morris Gleitzman, Margaret Mahy or Paula Danziger and look for the ways they use similes and metaphors to describe feelings and moods.

Slang is frequently used by writers of children's and young adult's literature. Sometimes it comes in the form of ordinary words given a special meaning: e.g. *cool* in the sense of being better than all right. In such cases the slang is often metaphorical. At other times slang takes the form of special words coined by a sub-culture in a society: e.g. *nerd* meaning someone who is definitely not 'cool'.

Discuss with students contemporary slang and the slang of your youth. Lead them to the realisation that slang is dynamic and tends to be short-lived (although some expressions may stay around for a long time or become absorbed into the body of the language). Slang can even skip a generation to re-emerge in a subsequent one; thus *groovy* from the 1960s has become popular again in the '90s.

Writers who use slang in their novels may find that it dates their books rather quickly. Those who do use slang include Paul Zindel, Margaret Clark, S. E. Hinton and Mary Steele, whose *Mallyroots' Pub at Misery Ponds* has some very funny Australian slang. Discuss examples of 'slang as slang' and 'slang as metaphor' in books by these writers and others.

Collect as many expressions as possible that are commonly associated with humour: e.g. *I nearly died laughing; she had the last laugh; tears of joy; tickle your funny bone; pleased as punch; tickled to death; split my sides laughing.* (A dictionary of quotations or proverbs can be a useful source.) See how many are similes or metaphors.

Have the students draw literal interpretations of these expressions and collect the drawings in their own 'Laugh Lines' book.

TV scripts

SUITABLE TITLE

Round the Twist by Paul Jennings

Television situation comedy is a popular source of enjoyment and humour for many teenagers and younger children. The sitcom can provide a useful framework for looking at the differences between presenting humour on television and in literature.

Conduct research into popular television sitcoms, using the following questions as guidelines for investigation and discussion:

What sorts of situations are commonly used to generate humour?

What serious topics are featured in the shows?

How are 'serious' problems resolved?

Who are the main characters? Describe them according to their age, status in the family, physical appearance, personality and friends. Do these characters ever change from one week to the next?

Prepare a brief plot outline for three episodes of a sitcom. Is there a pattern or formula?

After students have completed this research, they can apply the same questions to a humorous novel for children or young adults. The following authors would be suitable: Betsy Byars, Judy Blume, Anne Fine, M. E. Kerr, Barbara Robinson, Paul Zindel and Gordon Korman (refer to bibliography for titles). What differences from a typical television treatment emerge?

In *Round the Twist*, Paul Jennings describes the transformation that a novel undergoes when it is turned into a television series.

Refer to pp. 22–23, which show how a page of text is converted into a TV script. Discuss with students the two versions and the process involved. Have them convert a page from another story by Jennings (or another writer) into a scene for a TV series.

Refer to p. 98, which gives an example of a short storyline, 'Spaghetti Pig Out'. Explain that the purpose of a short storyline is to sell a show to television stations. Have students prepare a short storyline for a humorous story they have read which they feel would make a great TV program.

Refer to pp. 114–22, where the purpose and format of a storyboard is discussed and illustrated. Students can work in pairs and select one of Jennings' short stories to prepare as a storyboard. Emphasise that the pictures should be sketched with stick figures rather than being elaborate works of art; after all, the purpose of the activity is simply to re-conceptualise a story idea into a sequence for filming.

Select bibliography

The main purpose of this bibliography is to suggest a range of humorous books for children. Such books are very popular, not only with children but with publishers too, and new titles are always appearing in bookshops and on library shelves. None the less I have included a selection of older titles alongside the most recent at the time of writing. Some older books which have been out of print for some time are enjoying a new lease of life, with new editions emerging, while others which have not been so fortunate are no doubt still available in libraries.

Before the final References section, the bibliography has been divided into the following categories: Picture Books, Books for Younger Readers (pre-school - 9 years), Books for Older Readers (10 - 15 years), Verse, and Joke and Riddle Books. (The age ranges indicated here are intended as broad guidelines only and should be interpreted flexibly.) Most children's books mentioned in the text are listed in the appropriate category.

The References section lists the critical sources I have consulted during the writing of this book. It also includes the pre-1960 books for children referred to in Chapter 6. The date and publisher given for each of these books are those of the first edition. However, the date and publisher given for titles in earlier sections are in each case taken from my reference copy, which may not be from the first edition.

Picture Books

Ahlberg, Janet & Allan 1990, *Funnybones*, Little Mammoth.
Allen, Pamela 1985, *Watch Me*, Nelson.
— 1988, *Watch Me Now*, Viking Kestrel.
— 1990, *My Cat Maisie*, Penguin.
Anno, Mitsumasa 1978, *Anno's Journey*, Collins.
Ashe, Frank 1985, *Bear's Bargain*, Picture Corgi.
Blume, Judy 1988, *The Pain and the Great One*, illustrated by Irene Trivas, Pan.
Bodsworth, Nan 1989, *A Nice Walk in the Jungle*, Picture Puffins.
Bond, Michael 1992, *Paddington in the Kitchen*, Collins.
Briggs, Raymond 1973, *Father Christmas*, Hamish Hamilton.
— 1977, *Fungus the Bogeyman*, Hamish Hamilton.
— 1978, *The Snowman*, Hamish Hamilton.
— 1980, *Gentleman Jim*, Hamish Hamilton.
— 1982, *When the Wind Blows*, Hamish Hamilton.
— 1984, *The Tin Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman*, Hamish Hamilton.
— 1992, *The Man*, Julia MacRae.
Browne, Anthony 1977, *A Walk in the Park*, Julia MacRae.
— 1980, *Look What I've Got*, Julia MacRae.
— 1984, *Willy the Wimp*, Julia MacRae.
— 1985, *Willy the Champ*, Julia MacRae.
— 1986, *The Piggybook*, Julia MacRae.
Burningham, John 1978, *Mr Gumpy's Outing*, Picture Puffins.
— 1979, *Mr Gumpys's Motor Car*, Picture Puffins.
— 1984, *Granpa*, Cape.
Clement, Rod 1990, *Counting on Frank*, Collins/Anne Ingram.
Cole, Babette 1985, *The Trouble with Mum*, Picture Lions.
— 1986, *Princess Smartypants*, Hamish Hamilton.
— 1989, *Prince Cinders*, Picture Lions.
Cox, David 1985, *Bossyboots*, Bodley Head.
Freeman, Donald 1968, *Corduroy*, Viking.
French, Fiona 1986, *Snow White in New York*, Oxford University Press.
Gleeson, Libby 1992, *Where's MUM?*, illustrated by Craig Smith, Omnibus.
Goodall, John 1977, *The Surprise Picnic*, Macmillan.
— 1980, *Paddy's New Hat*, Macmillan.
Graham, Amanda 1987, *Educating Arthur*, Keystone Paperbacks.
Graham, Bob 1987, *Crusher is Coming*, Lothian.
— 1990, *Greetings from Sandy Beach*, Lothian.
Handford, Martin 1987, *Where's Wally?*, Random House.

Harris, Penny Robenstone 1992, *Burping Baby*, Heinneman.
Hutchins, Pat 1970, *Rosie's Walk*, Bodley Head.
—— 1988, *One-Eyed Jake*, Picture Puffins.
—— 1992, *Silly Billy*, Random House.
Kerr, Judith 1970, *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, Collins.
Langoulant, Allan, Turton, David & Jorgensen, Norman 1992, *Ashe of the Outback*, Thomas Catt.
—— 1992, *Ashe on Parade*, Thomas Catt.
Loh, Morag 1985, *Kinder Hat*, illustrated by Donna Rawlins, Hyland House.
Mahy, Margaret 1989, *The Great White Man-Eating Shark*, illustrated by Jonathan Allen, Picture Puffins.
—— 1992, *The Pumpkin Man and the Crafty Creeper*, illustrated by Helen Craig, Picture Puffins.
Mayer, Mercer 1975, *Frog on His Own*, Collins.
Munsch, Robert 1980, *The Paper Bag Princess*, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, Ashton Scholastic.
Rose, Gerald 1979, *The Tiger Skin Rug*, Prentice-Hall.
Rowe, Jeannette 1990, *Scallywag*, Ashton Scholastic.
Scieszka, Jon 1989, *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by A. Wolf*, illustrated by Lane Smith, Picture Puffins.
—— 1992, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, Viking.
Seuss, Dr 1940, *Horton Hatches the Egg*, Collins.
—— 1985, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, Random House.
Smyth, Gwenda & James, Ann 1989, *A Pet for Mrs Arbuckle*, Picture Puffins.
Steig, William 1982, *Doctor De Soto*, Beaver.
Tolstoy, Alexei & Oxenbury, Helen 1968, *The Great Big Enormous Turnip*, Heinemann.
Watanabe, Shigeo 1981, *How Do I Put It On?*, illustrated by Yasuo Ohtomo, Picture Puffins.
Wells, Rosemary 1977, *Morris's Disappearing Bag*, Viking Kestrel.
Wild, Margaret 1990, *Remember Me*, illustrated by Dee Huxley, Margaret Hamilton.

Books for Younger Readers

Ahlberg, Allan & Amstutz, Andre 1990, *Ten in a Bed*, Puffin.
Ball, Duncan 1988, *Selby Speaks*, Angus and Robertson.
Bates, Dianne 1987, *Grandma Cadbury's Trucking Tales*, Angus and Robertson.
Bond, Michael 1958, *A Bear Called Paddington*, Collins.
Carr, Roger Vaughan 1988, *The Split Creek Kids*, Martin Educational.
Chapman, Jean 1985, *The Tall Book of Tall Tales*, Hodder and Stoughton.
Cleary, Beverly 1970, *Ramona the Pest*, Morrow.

—— 1984, *Ramona Forever*, Puffin.
Dahl, Roald 1980, *The Twits*, illustrated by Quentin Blake, Puffin.
—— 1982, *The BFG*, illustrated by Quentin Blake, Cape.
—— 1989, *Matilda*, illustrated by Quentin Blake, Puffin.
—— 1991, *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke*, illustrated by Quentin Blake, Century.
Dann, Max 1989, *Clark*, illustrated by Carol Pelham-Thorman, Puffin.
—— 1990, *Dusting in Love*, illustrated by Terry Denton, Oxford University Press.
Feinberg, Anna 1991, *The Magnificent Nose and Other Marvels*, illustrated by Kim Gamble, Allen and Unwin.
Fine, Anne 1989, *The Country Pancake*, Mammoth.
—— 1990, *Bill's New Frock*, Mammoth.
Fleischman, Sid 1979, *McBroom's Wonderful One Acre Farm*, Puffin.
Flynn, Rachel 1990, *I Hate Fridays*, illustrated by Craig Smith, Puffin.
Hathorn, Libby 1992, *The Lenski Kids and Dracula*, Puffin.
Heide, Florence Parry 1975, *The Shrinking of Treehorn*, Puffin.
Jennings, Paul 1988, *The Cabbage Patch Fib*, Puffin.
—— 1989, *The Paw Thing*, Puffin.
King-Smith, Dick 1989, *The Hodgeheg*, Puffin.
—— 1989, *George Speaks*, Puffin.
Klein, Robin 1984, *Thalia the Failure*, Ashton Scholastic.
Leaf, Munro 1985, *The Story of Ferdinand*, Hamish Hamilton.
Marriott, Janice 1989, *Letters to Lesley*, Omnibus/Puffin.
Marsden, John 1989, *Staying Alive in Grade Five*, Pan.
Matthews, Cecily 1990, *Thinking Power*, Omnibus/Puffin.
Milne, A. A. 1975, *Pooh Goes Visiting and Pooh and Piglet Nearly Catch a Woozle*, illustrated by Ernest Shepard, Methuen Children's Books.
Norman, Lilith 1979, *My Simple Little Brother*, Collins.
—— 1989, *The Laurel and Hardy Kids*, Random House.
Pegeuro, Leone 1990, *Mervyn's Revenge*, Margaret Hamilton.
Perkins, Al 1967, *The Digging-est Dog*, illustrated by Eric Gurney, Collins.
Rodda, Emily 1990, *Crumbs!*, Omnibus.
Ross, Tony 1986, *Foxy Fables*, Andersen Press.
Steele, Mary 1988, *Mallyroots' Pub at Misery Ponds*, Hyland House.
Wakefield, S. A. 1967, *Bottersnikes and Gumbles*, Collins.
Walker, Kate 1989, *The Dragon of Mith*, Allen and Unwin.
Wild, Margaret 1988, *The Diary of Megan Moon (Soon To Be Rich and Famous)*, Collins.
Winton, Tim 1991, *The Bugalugs Bum Thief*, illustrated by Carol Pelham-Thorman, Puffin.
Yolen, Jane 1981, *Uncle Lemon's Spring*, Dutton.

Books for Older Readers

Blume, Judy 1981, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, Piccolo.

Byars, Betsy 1976, *The Eighteenth Emergency*, Puffin.

— 1987, *A Blossom Promise*, Bodley Head.

Clark, Margaret 1992, *Famous for Five Minutes*, Random House.

Clarke, Judith 1988, *The Heroic Life of Al Capsella*, University of Queensland Press.

— 1990, *Al Capsella and the Watchdogs*, University of Queensland Press.

Coleman, Michael 1992, *Tutankhamen Is a Bit of a Mummy's Boy*, Red Fox.

Cormier, Robert 1990, *Other Bells for Us To Ring*, Delacorte Press.

Cresswell, Helen 1977, *Ordinary Jack*, Macmillan.

— 1984, *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, Fontana Lions.

Fleischman, Sid 1986, *The Whipping Boy*, Greenwillow Books.

Gleitzman, Morris 1990, *Two Weeks with the Queen*, Piper.

— 1991, *Misery Guts*, Piper.

— 1991, *Worry Warts*, Piper.

Greenwald, Sheila 1980, *It All Began with Jane Eyre or the Secret Life of Fanny Dillman*, Dell.

Grieve, James 1987, *A Season of Grannies*, University of Queensland Press.

Harris, Christine 1992, *Outer Face*, Random House.

Hathorn, Libby 1992, *Love Me Tender*, Oxford University Press.

Holkner, Jean 1987, *Taking the Chook and Other Traumas*, Puffin.

Hurle, Garry 1990, *Angie's Ankles*, Omnibus/Puffin.

Jennings, Paul 1986, *Unbelievable!*, Puffin.

— 1990, *Unbearable!*, Puffin.

— 1990, *Round the Twist*, Puffin.

Juster, Norton 1962, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, Collins.

Kemp, Gene 1979, *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler*, Puffin.

Kerr, M. E. 1972, *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack*, Gollancz.

Klein, Robin 1983, *Penny Pollard's Diary*, Oxford University Press.

— 1984, *Hating Alison Ashley*, Penguin.

— 1985, *Halfway across the Galaxy and Turn Left*, Penguin.

Korman, Gordon 1990, *Losing Joe's Place*, Scholastic.

Lawson, Henry 1970, *The Loaded Dog*, Angus and Robertson.

Lee, Benjamin 1976, *It Can't Be Helped*, Bodley Head.

Lindgren, Astrid 1976, *Pippi Longstocking*, Puffin.

Mark, Jan 1983, *Feet: and Other Stories*, Kestrel.

Naughton, Bill 1977, *My Pal Spadger*, Dent.

Odgers, Sally 1992, *Three Loony Months*, Angus and Robertson.

Oswald, Debra 1987, *Me and Barry Terrific*, Oxford University Press.
Robinson, Barbara 1976, *The Worst Kids in the World*, Beaver.
Rockwell, Thomas 1979, *How To Eat Fried Worms*, Piccolo.
Rodgers, Mary 1976, *Freaky Friday*, Puffin.
Stewart, Maureen 1987, *Love from Greg*, Puffin Plus.
— 1988, *Tall Tales from the Speewah*, Penguin.
Stow, Randolph 1969, *Midnite: The Story of a Wild Colonial Boy*, Penguin.
Taylor, William 1987, *The Worst Soccer Team Ever*, Puffin.
Thiele, Colin 1961, *The Sun on the Stubble*, Rigby.
— 1965, *February Dragon*, Rigby.
— 1969, *Blue Fin*, Rigby.
— 1977, *The Shadow on the Hills*, Harper and Row.
Townsend, Sue 1985, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4*, Methuen.
Wilson, David Henry 1986, *There's a Wolf in My Pudding*, illustrated by Jonathan Allen, Dent.
Winton, Tim 1990, *Lockie Leonard, Human Torpedo*, McPhee Gribble.
Zindel, Paul 1976, *Pardon Me, You're Steeping on My Eyeball!*, Bodley Head.
— 1978, *Confessions of a Teenage Baboon*, Bodley Head.
— 1979, *The Undertaker's Gone Bananas*, Bodley Head.

Verse

While most of these titles focus on humorous verse, some collections with a mix of emotions and moods have been included if it was felt that there was sufficient humorous content.

Ahlberg, Allan 1984, *Please Mrs Butler*, illustrated by Fritz Wegner, Puffin.
Carroll, Lewis 1987, *Jabberwocky: from Through the Looking Glass*, illustrated by Graeme Base, Macmillan.
Causley, Charles 1987, *Jack the Treacle Eater*, illustrated by Charles Keeping, Macmillan Children's Books.
Chapman, Jean 1991, *Little Billy Bandicoot: Rhymes and Songs for Australian Children*, illustrated by Sandra Laroche, Lothian.
Cole, Joanna & Calmenson, Stephanie 1988, *The Laugh Book*, Scholastic.
Cole, William 1972, *Oh, That's Ridiculous!*, illustrated by Tomi Ungerer, Methuen Children's Books.
— 1980, *Oh, Such Foolishness!*, illustrated by Tomie de Paola, Methuen Children's Books.
Covernton, Jane (comp.) 1985, *Putrid Poems*, illustrated by Craig Smith, Omnibus.

—— 1986, *Petrifying Poems*, illustrated by Craig Smith, Omnibus.
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Kerry Mallan is a lecturer at Queensland University of Technology, where she teaches children's literature, storytelling and teacher-librarianship. She is the author of *Children as Storytellers* (PETA 1991).

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